NOVEL-STORY-WORLD

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Gajendra Thakur · English translation by the author · Complete chapter-by-chapter synopses

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WORK / कृति

01 A Water Burial Among the Crocodiles

Parts 0, 1 and 2 · 301 chapters · Three appendices

SECTION / खण्ड

Part 0 · The Backstory

Chapters −100 to −1

Chapter [-100] — Conch Shell and Silver

Part 0 · The Backstory

The narrative opens with twelve hundred years of memories of Garh Narikel. In Vachaspati Mishra’s debating hall, the illusion of mistaking a conch shell for silver raises questions about the relationship between the self and the world. The Naiyayikas’ anyathakhyati, the Prabhakaras’ akhyati, and Advaita’s anirvacaniyakhyati become the subjects of debate. Vachaspati extends the distinction between illusion and truth into an inquiry into the self. This philosophical disputation establishes the fundamental question for the story that follows: what appears before us is not always true, and names that have fallen out of use can still be preserved through memory.

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Chapter [-99] — The Debate on Establishing the Self

Part 0 · The Backstory

In a debating hall in Mithila, Udayana and Kshanabhadra, representing the Buddhist position, dispute the existence of the self. They examine the doctrine of momentariness, the view that only consciousness is real, and questions concerning the continuity of memory and experience. Udayana argues for an enduring knower through the identity of the person who says ‘I’, the act of recollection, and the unity of experience. Kshanabhadra’s questions are not completely resolved; in the end both sides acknowledge the seriousness of the other’s thought. The philosophical dispute lays the foundation for the themes of memory, witness, and personal identity in this part.

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Chapter [-98] — Who Created This World?

Part 0 · The Backstory

Udayanacharya’s arguments concerning God take the form of a folk play. In the village square, beside a potter’s wheel, at a grain store, and in the home of Lekhani Didi, Charvaka and other characters question the origins of the world, its creation and order, and the source of language. The argument for a maker begins with a pot shaped by a potter, but Charvaka asks how the existence of a potter who makes pots can establish a creator of the world. The dialogue develops through numerous arguments and counterarguments. Instead of imposing a conclusion, the chapter draws major philosophical questions out of the ordinary objects of village life.

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Chapter [-97] — The Chintamani Jewel

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Gangesha Upadhyaya’s debating hall, the ‘Chintamani jewel’ becomes a metaphor for a valid means of knowing. Using lamps, earthen pitchers, and everyday examples, Buddhist, Mimamsa, and other questioners debate knowledge, inference, memory, and the nature of reality. Before accepting any conclusion, Gangesha insists on examining the basis of an argument and its limits. The jewel is not an external miraculous object but the observer’s discernment and capacity to test what is claimed. This sequence plants the seed of the relationship between written records and the people’s memory that will develop later.

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Chapter [-96] — Safeguarding Memory

Part 0 · The Backstory

The death of Hulasa, a young woman who copies manuscripts in Vachaspati Mishra’s debating hall, turns the narrative away from philosophical disputation and towards human grief. Vachaspati’s attendant Budhua watches Hulasa’s labour and her very name slip into oblivion. Before the teacher, Karnapur, and the village head, questions arise about the labour of manuscript copyists, women’s unequal standing, and the recording of names. A stone placed in Hulasa’s memory and Budhua’s vow begin a long tradition of justly preserving the names of the dead. The seed of the figure later known as ‘Budhba’ is planted here.

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Chapter [-95] — The Submerged Manuscript

Part 0 · The Backstory

At Udayanacharya’s monastery, Budhua teaches a young disciple, Jivanti, how to preserve manuscripts. During a flood, Jivanti loses her life trying to save a manuscript of the Kiranavali. The abbot expresses satisfaction that the book has survived, but Udayana asks how the preservation of a text could have become more important than a human life. A rule is established in the monastery that the names of both books and the attendants and disciples who save them must be preserved. In folklore, Jivanti’s memory begins to take the form of the ‘water maiden’ and the ‘panidubbi’; Budhua’s vow to protect names grows still stronger.

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Chapter [-94] — The Silence of Four Faces

Part 0 · The Backstory

During a famine, Samkhya, Charvaka, Buddhist, and Mimamsa scholars assemble at Udayana’s monastery while hungry people seek help outside its gate. In the midst of a debate confined within doctrinal boundaries, Sohan’s death unsettles everyone. Budhua and Udayana ask why scriptural reasoning has become separated from people’s immediate hunger. The scholars agree that they must first learn the condition of those in need and only then engage in debate. A peepal tree becomes the ‘Witness Tree’; its four faces preserve the memory of four philosophical voices.

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Chapter [-93] — The Conch Shell’s Final Question

Part 0 · The Backstory

Near the end of his life, a very old objector, who once raised questions about the conch-and-silver illusion in Vachaspati’s assembly, arrives at Udayana’s monastery. Once again he asks what the search for truth can mean when different schools of thought disagree. Udayana explains that the schools agree that an illusion occurs; they differ in their explanations of it. The questioner takes to his deathbed, and a silver-like radiance is shown rising towards the peepal tree in his final moments. In village legend, that moment survives as the light of ‘Rakash’. The human dignity of questioning remains intact.

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Chapter [-92] — Prisoner of the Water Clock

Part 0 · The Backstory

At Acharya Keshav’s judicial assembly, the water clock used to measure time becomes an instrument of delay rather than justice. Sukhdev Mahto brings a dispute over his land and irrigation channel against Ugrasen Thakur, but the powerful party repeatedly raises fresh questions to postpone the hearing. Fields dry up, the buffalo Kajri grows thin, and Sukhdev dies before he can finish presenting his case. A remorseful Keshav establishes the ‘Sukhdev Rule’: those who have waited longest must be heard first. In Budhba’s memory, Sukhdev’s unfinished voice survives as a ‘loth’.

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Chapter [-91] — Light in the Leatherworkers’ Settlement

Part 0 · The Backstory

Ratna and Somar of the leatherworkers’ settlement take the young Gangesha, unconscious with fever, into their home and care for him. Malati’s experience gives Gangesha’s rational reflection a new human grounding, and the two decide to marry. Amid caste opposition, Gangesha confronts social convention; the aged Budhua explains the meaning of justice grounded in memory and of human relationships. The knowledge possessed by Ratna, Malati, and the women of the settlement comes into view. Through historical oral tradition and imagined characters, the chapter brings the contribution of a neglected community to the centre of the story.

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Chapter [-90] — Budhua’s Water Burial

Part 0 · The Backstory

Budhua, now extremely old and called ‘Budhba’ by the children, comes to feel that through the body alone he will not be able to safeguard every name forever. Carrying a conch shell and a cord beside Jori Pond, he remembers the names of many forgotten people, including Sukhdev. One night he enters the pond of his own free will and takes jal samadhi, a water burial; in the morning only the conch shell and a worn cord are found on the shore. Later, a faint shadow near the peepal tree is seen, and a voice calling people’s names is heard. Out of this event arises the ‘Budhba ghost’, the figure of Budhua as a guardian of memory.

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Chapter [-89] — The First Night, the First Flood

Part 0 · The Backstory

A year after the water burial, a great flood strikes Garh Narikel. Although the bodiless Budhba perceives the danger, he cannot knock on doors or warn everyone directly. Gauri, a girl from the leatherworkers’ settlement, hears his warning in a dream and alerts her family and neighbours, but the flood still claims lives. After the disaster, the village builds a stronger embankment, and the name ‘Garh Narikel’ becomes established. The bond of witnessing between Gauri and Budhba deepens, and the possibility of a ‘half-ghost’ enters popular belief.

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Chapter [-88] — An Accusation of Witchcraft

Part 0 · The Backstory

Twenty years later, Gauri has become a skilled folk healer. Her treatment of the ailing Vishwanath from a high-status household, together with the growing reputation of the leatherworkers’ settlement, arouses the self-interest and caste anxieties of Yashpati and Pratapsen. Gauri’s knowledge of healing is twisted into an accusation of witchcraft to incite the people against her. The village council’s hearing is one-sided, and a torch-bearing mob advances towards the settlement. Gauri leaves her daughter in Phulesari’s care and reaches the peepal tree to seek Budhba’s help. The chapter ends with the threat of mob violence still imminent.

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Chapter [-87] — At the Settlement Gate

Part 0 · The Backstory

Phulesari and the women of the settlement stop the approaching torch-bearing crowd, standing with children and lamps. Kamala Devi, Pratapsen’s wife, comes forward herself and bears witness to the treatment Gauri gave. Along with Budhba’s presence, the collective voices of the women weaken the basis of Yashpati’s accusation. The crowd withdraws; Gauri and the leatherworkers’ settlement are saved, and their rights to the land are recorded again. The humiliated Yashpati, however, silently plants the seed of another conspiracy that will become a future danger.

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Chapter [-86] — The Crocodile of Time

Part 0 · The Backstory

Yashpati leaves the village and heads towards the royal court. Meanwhile, unusual scenes of time open within Budhba’s consciousness: ships of the distant future, migrant labourers, and children playing kabaddi in Channa Grove while calling out the names of the dead. Gauri listens to his experience but cannot fully understand the relationship between the present and the future. Budhba can no longer regard time simply as a stream flowing in one direction; he also admits to seeing someone like Gauri in the future. The chapter brings together a foreshadowing of later events and the limits of Budhba’s omniscience.

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Chapter [-85] — The Amil’s Order

Part 0 · The Backstory

Yashpati returns to the village with Jaisingh, the royal court’s amil, and tries to have the peepal Witness Tree cut down. Gauri, Savitri, and the villagers explain the tree’s importance to their shared social memory. During a public test, Budhba’s form becomes clearly visible, changing Jaisingh’s outlook. He says he will recommend protecting the tree, the land, and the village’s rights. Yashpati flees and disappears into the forest; his vanishing leaves behind new fears and unanswered questions.

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Chapter [-84] — The Forest’s Silence

Part 0 · The Backstory

The village head, young men, and soldiers cross the river into a dense forest in search of Yashpati. They find torn clothing and footprints, but cannot establish whether Yashpati is alive or dead. Fear drives the search party back. Gauri asks Budhba whether it is just that a man who tried to erase other people’s names should now have his own name forgotten. Budhba’s answer exposes the moral complexity of hatred and oblivion. The awakening of an unknown power in the forest darkness links the chapter to the later tale of the ‘Original Crocodile’.

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Chapter [-83] — Sonma Majhin

Part 0 · The Backstory

After Yashpati’s disappearance, the village’s livestock begin vanishing mysteriously. On Budhba’s advice, Gauri visits the elderly Sonma Majhin by the river. Sonma recounts the traditional knowledge of ancestors who lived from the water and tells the story of the ‘Original Crocodile’ as a hunger that devours names and memories. She warns that forgetting cannot be stopped altogether; what matters is honouring every life before it is forgotten. Through Sonma’s reflections, Budhba recognises the limits of his anger. The crisis on the river remains unresolved.

Chapter [-82] — The First Kabaddi

Part 0 · The Backstory

Over three years, fear spreads as both livestock and villagers go missing. Sixteen-year-old Savitri dreams of a game of kabaddi in which the name of a forgotten dead person is called during every turn. With Gauri and Budhba, she organises the first name-kabaddi beside Jori Pond on a new-moon night, calling out Subhagi’s name. The disturbance in the pond subsides. From that day onwards, kabaddi becomes a collective rite of remembrance on every new moon; Savitri and, later, her descendants become its guardians.

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Chapter [-81] — The Shadow of an Invasion

Part 0 · The Backstory

Twenty years later, new-moon kabaddi has become an established custom. News of an attack on Simraongarh and the fall of its rulers spreads fear through the village. Wandering soldiers arrive to plunder, but a collective game of kabaddi organised at Indumati’s signal, and the fearless unity of the villagers, save the settlement from immediate destruction. Budhba understands that the custom of remembering the dead also gives the living courage. Even so, a major political change and uncertainty about a new regime and new laws open the door to another era.

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Chapter [-80] — The First Line of a Song

Part 0 · The Backstory

In a changing literary atmosphere, the travelling poet Haripati arrives in Garh Narikel. He hears from Indumati the folk tales of Budhba, name-kabaddi, death, and memory, and expresses his wish to write them in Maithili. Budhba hopes that, rather than being dressed in courtly ornament, the stories will retain the truth of the village’s own language and experience. Haripati collects the tales but decides not to present them at court immediately. The hope of preserving the manuscript through a succession of disciples opens another medium for sustaining memory through writing.

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Chapter [-79] — A Turn of Forgiveness

Part 0 · The Backstory

Responsibility for the ritual passes to Sharada and then Vasundhara. Raghuvir, grandson of Pratapsen, visits the leatherworkers' settlement and asks forgiveness for his family's old injustices. Budhba says that preserving names means not only mourning the dead but giving the living a chance to change their conduct. Raghuvir decides to return a portion of the land his family took unjustly. In this turn of the game, forgiveness becomes not merely a word but an act of partial restitution.

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Chapter [-78] — Outside the Genealogical Register

Part 0 · The Backstory

The genealogist Yadavanand Jha comes to Garh Narikel and meets Vasundhara. He is disturbed to discover that the formal family registers of Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas contain no names for many families, including those of the leatherworkers’ settlement. Vasundhara recounts names, relationships, and episodes from successive generations. Yadavanand writes them in a private notebook and begins an alternative record resembling a ‘shadow register’. The chapter reveals an attempt to give those excluded from institutional registers an equal right to remembrance.

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Chapter [-77] — Budhba’s Silence

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Kaushalya’s time, Budhba’s voice grows faint, and on one new-moon night he fails to appear as the umpire of the kabaddi game. The village realises that Budhua, who has always protected other people’s names, has never received full collective recognition for his own labour and sacrifice. Prompted by Kaushalya and Godavari, the villagers recount the events of his life one by one. Budhba’s light becomes steady again. Through the events of this chapter, it becomes clear that a witness, too, needs remembrance and affection.

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Chapter [-76] — The First Lesson on a Coconut Leaf

Part 0 · The Backstory

Kaushalya’s daughter Mandakini observes that written village records have multiplied, while access to education remains limited for Dalit children and women. She gathers dried coconut leaves and establishes the first school in the leatherworkers’ settlement, open regardless of caste or gender. The children learn to write the names of their ancestors. Budhba regards writing not as a replacement for witnessing but as its ally. This beginning on coconut leaves lays the foundation for educated generations, records, and technologies to come.

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Chapter [-75] — Reason’s First Rebellion

Part 0 · The Backstory

Several generations after Mandakini’s school began, Vishwanath returns to the village after studying in town and questions both Budhba’s reality and the kabaddi ritual. Some people regard his reasoning as rebellion, but Budhba supports the freedom to ask questions. Astonished by his own experience, Vishwanath returns to the peepal tree. Rather than demanding blind belief, Budhba urges him to reflect on what he has seen and tested himself. The chapter opens a path on which education, scepticism, and folk tradition can coexist.

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Chapter [-74] — The Tree’s Illness

Part 0 · The Backstory

Kedar, a guardian of the ritual, notices the peepal leaves turning yellow and its bark becoming diseased. Because Budhba’s memory is bound to the tree, the entire village feels threatened. People from different neighbourhoods draw on the botanical knowledge handed down through Sonma’s and Ratna’s families to treat and care for it. Within a year the tree recovers. Budhba acknowledges that his own continued existence depends on protecting a living tree. Safeguarding memory thus becomes a responsibility to safeguard the environment.

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Chapter [-73] — Mohan’s Melody

Part 0 · The Backstory

In the time of Shilavati, Kedar’s daughter, the four-year-old Radhika, daughter of Mohan, a drummer from the leatherworkers’ settlement, dies of fever. After a long silence, Mohan composes a new, grief-stricken melody on his drum. Shilavati connects this melody with the name-kabaddi ritual, and a custom begins of playing a tune suited to the life of each person being remembered. Budhba recognises music as a medium of preserving memory distinct from words. Personal grief becomes a collective musical tradition.

Chapter [-72] — A Witness to Marriage

Part 0 · The Backstory

Anuradha, Shilavati’s granddaughter, and Gopinath of the Brahmin settlement move from childhood friendship to love. Caste opposition arises, particularly from Gopinath’s family. Recalling the names of those wronged in the past, Budhba asks whether the new generation will repeat old tragedies or choose a new way of relating to one another. Eventually the families agree. The marriage takes place beside the peepal tree with both neighbourhoods participating, while Mohan’s descendants play a festive tune. The wedding becomes a concrete instance of memory leading towards social change.

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Chapter [-71] — The Night of the Epidemic

Part 0 · The Backstory

An epidemic brings widespread death and fear to the village. Vimala and Budhba find that the earlier practice of remembering each dead person in detail is no longer possible amid such a severe outbreak. Local healers isolate patients, boil water, and adopt measures of cleanliness. Alongside these efforts, Vimala begins ‘collective remembrance’, in which the names of the dead are called together in one voice. The chapter combines public-health measures with mourning rituals without abandoning the dignity of any individual.

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Chapter [-70] — Planting Channa Grove

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the epidemic, Vimala proposes that the dead and the village’s struggles be remembered by planting trees in the earth. Around the peepal tree, channa trees are planted, one after another, in the names of Hulasa, Jivanti, families struck by the epidemic, and others. Over time they become a whole ‘Channa Grove’. Budhba feels that his presence has spread from a single peepal to many roots and trees. The place of memory is now not only a manuscript or the human voice but also the shared environment.

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Chapter [-69] — The Tale of the Elephant and the Crocodile

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Suryanath’s time, the temple elephant Gajraj enters Jori Pond, where a huge crocodile catches hold of its leg. The villagers recall the Puranic story of Gajendra Moksha, the deliverance of the elephant. Encouraged by Budhba, prayer and practical rescue efforts proceed together: the young men use ropes and bamboo poles to free Gajraj. The crocodile retreats and the elephant survives. The chapter reworks the Puranic story through local aquatic life, collective skill, and patience.

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Chapter [-68] — The Court’s First Hearing Date

Part 0 · The Backstory

During Kamalini’s time, a formal court is established in the village. Although equality under written law is welcomed, the long delays in hearings wear down poor litigants. Cases brought by people such as Bhola remain unresolved for years, reminding Budhba of Sukhdev Mahto’s unfinished hearing. Kamalini cannot change the judicial system immediately, but resolves to provide advice, assistance, and community solidarity to those who wait. The injustice of the old water clock returns in the new system as the repeated ‘hearing date’.

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Chapter [-67] — The Call of Distant Lands

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Janaki’s time, labour recruiters come to the village promising attractive employment abroad. Poor Ramsevak puts his thumbprint on a contract without fully understanding it and leaves for a distant country; no news of him follows. Janaki establishes a practice of keeping a token beside the peepal tree for each person who has gone away and calling their names at new-moon gatherings. Ramsevak’s mother continues to wait for his return. Budhba makes it clear that he does not know what has happened to Ramsevak, but he will not let his name be forgotten.

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Chapter [-66] — The Women’s Night Assembly

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Sulochana’s time, a formal court turns away Padma, a victim of domestic violence, calling her case a ‘domestic matter’. Sulochana brings together the descendants of Phulesari and other village women to establish the ‘Women’s Night Assembly’. In Padma’s case, the women give collective testimony, and her husband’s family faces social pressure. The assembly becomes an independent space for hearing questions of dowry, inheritance, assault, and women’s rights. The earlier women’s group in the leatherworkers’ settlement acquires an institutional voice.

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Chapter [-65] — The Procession of False Ghosts

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Harinandan’s time, Kalicharan pretends to be Budhba’s spirit, organises processions of hired counterfeit ghosts, and extorts money by frightening people. The village is thrown into confusion by the deception. Budhba explains to Harinandan that a true witness calls for names and remembrance; he neither sells fear nor demands money. Harinandan spreads this criterion among nearby villages. As people become more aware, Kalicharan’s racket collapses and he flees.

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Chapter [-64] — Sukhdev’s Revenge

Part 0 · The Backstory

During a new land survey, the landlord Raghubir Singh claims the land of the leatherworkers’ settlement. Although Champavati remembers how helpless Sukhdev once was, this time she gathers a lawyer educated at the village school, the Women’s Night Assembly, and the records preserved in Haripati’s manuscript. On the strength of this evidence, the court rejects the landlord’s claim. Budhba calls it Sukhdev’s ‘revenge’, not in the sense of retaliation but as historical justice and the protection of rights. Memory becomes a useful documentary record.

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Chapter [-63] — The First Page from the Printing Press

Part 0 · The Backstory

The arrival of the printing press creates the possibility of the village’s stories reaching readers in many copies for the first time. Haripati Gangadhar, a descendant of the poet Haripati, brings the old manuscript and proposes printing it. Although pleased, Budhba says the story is still alive and unfinished; it must not be fixed in a book before its time. Gangadhar promises to preserve the manuscript and publish it when the time is right. The transition from handwritten memory to print is presented together with the responsibility that publication entails.

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Chapter [-62] — Waiting for Relief

Part 0 · The Backstory

A famine strikes under British rule. Government relief centres are distant, registration is difficult, and assistance is delayed. With support from an organisation of women and educated young people, Savitri Devi begins a common grain store and an account of what each household needs. By the time the relief party arrives three months later, the village has already averted famine deaths. Savitri Devi makes it clear to the officer that the villagers have not rejected assistance, but neither have they waited passively for it. The chapter shows the results of collective self-reliance.

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Chapter [-61] — The Comet in the Sky

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Rudranath’s time, a bright comet appears in the sky. Astrologers pronounce it an evil omen, spreading fear through the village. Budhba speaks of his sense of an uncertain future but makes no concrete prediction. Rudranath directs the villagers to take precautions concerning grain stores, water sources, and signs of disease. Even after the comet disappears, a heavy atmosphere remains. The chapter prepares the ground for a series of crises involving fire, flood, and illness.

Chapter [-60] — The Night of Fire

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the comet, a lamp falls near a grain store on a summer night, starting a great fire. Indrani warns households one by one, while villagers form a human chain to carry water from the pond. The Women’s Night Assembly becomes the main body organising the rescue. Although a quarter of the village houses burn down, the peepal tree and most of Channa Grove survive. Afterwards, new rules are established for the safe placement of lamps and the storage of emergency water. Budhba regards human organisation as the true power behind the rescue.

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Chapter [-59] — The Second Flood

Part 0 · The Backstory

Three months after the fire, a great flood comes to the Kamla-Balan River. Drawing on her experience, Indrani arranges for the embankment to be strengthened, children and elderly people to be moved to higher ground, and advance warnings to be given through drums and bells. Part of the embankment breaks, destroying houses and fields, but the preparations prevent any loss of life. Indrani remembers Subhagi's death in Gauri's time. Budhba says that knowledge learned from old suffering is now saving lives.

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Chapter [-58] — The Third Calamity

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the flood, stagnant, filthy water spreads intestinal disease and dehydration. During this third crisis, Indrani organises the use of local herbal knowledge, safe drinking water, sanitation, and collective care. The descendants of Sonma and Ratna contribute their traditional knowledge. Despite its fear, the village confronts the epidemic. The 'Year of Three Calamities' becomes a shared memory of fire, flood, and disease; alongside the names of the dead, the experience of collective organisation also passes to the next generation.

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Chapter [-57] — The Sahib's Notebook

Part 0 · The Backstory

After Indrani's time, in the days of Nandkishore, an English scholar named Henry Thompson studies the village's ghosts, kabaddi, Night Assembly, and history of calamities. In his published account he distorts local knowledge by calling it superstition and describes the women's organisation as disorder. Inspired by Budhba, Nandkishore writes a firm rebuttal and resolves to preserve the village's story in its own language, from the villagers' point of view. The need for a community to tell its own story becomes central in opposition to an outsider's writing.

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Chapter [-56] — The Call for Independence

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Lakshmi Devi's time, news of the independence movement reaches Garh Narikel. Ramashray calls on the villagers to join non-cooperation, the Swadeshi movement, and peaceful resistance. Lakshmi Devi organises the women; young people spin thread and boycott foreign cloth. The authorities arrest some of the protesters, but the village continues its organised resistance. Ramashray is later released and returns. Budhba regards this struggle as a new collective turn in the effort to preserve self-respect and people's names.

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Chapter [-55] — The Dawn of Independence

Part 0 · The Backstory

On the occasion of independence on 15 August, the tricolour is raised in the village square, and children sing patriotic songs. Vishwambharnath shares this historic moment with Budhba. Remembering Hulasa, Sukhdev, Gauri, and other forgotten people, Budhba says that political freedom does not automatically end caste injustice, poverty, or gender inequality. The villagers light lamps and tell their ancestors the news of independence. Alongside the celebration of freedom, the chapter acknowledges the unfinished task of social justice.

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Chapter [-54] — The End of Zamindari

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the abolition of the zamindari system, land relations change in Garh Narikel. During the time of Kamla Devi the Second, poor families gain stronger claims to land, although opposition and disputes also arise from former landowners. Some families become self-reliant, while education and employment open opportunities beyond the land. Budhba does not treat social change as something entirely new; he places it within the history of centuries. He insists that the names of those connected with both the benefits and the suffering brought by every change must be preserved.

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Chapter [-53] — The First Electric Light

Part 0 · The Backstory

After Kamla Devi's time, during Harivansh's days, the first electric bulb lights up the village square. People welcome the new illumination, and the character of life after dark begins to change. Budhba warns that shadows grow along with the light: new conveniences must not displace old memories. Electricity gradually reaches one house after another. Harivansh preserves an old earthen lamp alongside the modern bulb, maintaining a connection between new amenities and the village's inheritance.

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Chapter [-52] — The Call from the Borders

Part 0 · The Backstory

News of wars towards China and Pakistan reaches the village over the radio. Young soldiers, among them Vijay Kumar, leave for the borders; waiting and anxiety spread through their homes. Budhba says that those who die on the battlefield find another life in the memory of their villages through their names. On his return, Vijay Kumar tells children of his experiences and names the comrades who never came back. In this episode, the village's tradition of bearing witness becomes connected to grief beyond its boundaries and to national history.

Chapter [-51] — Seeds of the Green Revolution

Part 0 · The Backstory

New seeds and chemical fertilisers introduced by the Green Revolution increase the rice harvest. Sunayana notices that, alongside these gains, older flood-tolerant varieties of paddy are disappearing from the village. After talking with Budhba, she creates a small store of traditional seed with help from Ratna's descendants and keeps these varieties alive by growing them every year. While welcoming progress, the chapter considers the protection of biodiversity and agricultural knowledge passed down through generations essential.

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Chapter [-50] — The Darkness of the Emergency

Part 0 · The Backstory

During the Emergency of 1975, administrative surveillance and restrictions on public gatherings increase. Sunayana and the village women do not abandon their Night Assembly. Instead, they continue their meetings about justice cautiously, in darkness and whispers. Police patrols make the danger of meeting apparent. Budhba reminds them that periods of repression are temporary, but raising a voice again after it has been silenced is difficult. The continuing Night Assembly becomes an act of civic courage.

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Chapter [-49] — The Year of Drought

Part 0 · The Backstory

In a year of drought, Gopal brings together the government's relief machinery and the village's voluntary organisations. He keeps an account of each household's need for grain, checks the names left out of relief distributions, and has closed wells reopened. The village creates its own sources of water. Gopal also keeps copies of government papers in the local archive, so that the record of relief can serve as evidence in the future. Confronting famine becomes a shared undertaking of remembrance and administrative accountability.

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Chapter [-48] — The Voices of Radio and Television

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Gopal's time, the first radio and television in the village square bring the voices and images of distant places to the village. Children are drawn to the screen, while the old gatherings for oral tales and songs begin to weaken. Kusum notices that television images of floods elsewhere remind villagers of their own floods. Rather than reject the new medium, she links it to gatherings where traditional stories are told. The chapter shows both the power of new communications and their effect on closeness within the community.

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Chapter [-47] — The Labour Market of the Gulf

Part 0 · The Backstory

As the labour market in the Gulf countries opens up, young villagers begin leaving to earn money overseas. Kusum's husband Ramesh goes to Dubai and sends letters and money, but his absence is keenly felt during festivals and in everyday family life. Budhba warns that while working abroad, people must not forget their language and identity. Kusum places tokens of remembrance beside the peepal tree for those who have gone overseas. The unfinished story of Ramsevak, the earlier indentured migrant, becomes linked to this new wave of economic migration.

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Chapter [-46] — A Test of Communal Harmony

Part 0 · The Backstory

Communal rumours attempt to spread distrust between Hindus and Muslims in the village. But members of both communities, who have lived together for generations, remember their shared floods, labour, ponds, and names, and stand united. Kusum and Budhba emphasise the importance of recognising each other as individual human beings. A joint meeting for communal harmony is held, and participation in one another's festivals grows. Rumour is challenged through remembrance and direct human contact.

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Chapter [-45] — The Winds of Liberalisation

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the economic liberalisation of 1991, new goods, private-sector jobs, and cable television enter the marketplace. Kusum's son Dinesh finds employment with a company in the city. Modern opportunities also bring a growing sense of distance from the village's older rhythms and relationships. Budhba welcomes the new winds but advises people to keep their roots strong. Dinesh continues the tradition of taking his children to the peepal tree to hear the village's history.

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Chapter [-44] — The First Computer

Part 0 · The Backstory

During Pratima's time, the first computer is installed at the Narikel Leaf School. Children are delighted by the marvel of being able to write letters instantly on a screen, but the elders ask whether a machine can also preserve the meaning of a person's name. Budhba distinguishes information from human identity. Pratima and her pupils begin typing folk songs, names, and old stories into the computer. The first foundations of a digital archive are laid.

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Chapter [-43] — The Drying River Channel

Part 0 · The Backstory

The drying channel of the Kamla-Balan, deforestation, and increasing pollution draw the village's attention. In earlier times floods were the main fear; now the lack of water becomes a new crisis. Budhba explains to Satyanarayan that if the river, earth, and air do not survive, the village that safeguards people's names will not survive either. Work begins on planting trees, protecting pond banks, and conserving rainwater. Environmental protection becomes an extension of the protection of memory.

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Chapter [-42] — The Wonder of the Handheld Phone

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Satyanarayan's time, the arrival of mobile phones allows the voices of sons and daughters living far away to reach home instantly. An elderly mother is moved when she hears over the phone the voice of her son who has gone abroad. Yet the distance between people sitting side by side also grows. Anjali teaches elderly villagers to use phones while reminding them of the importance of face-to-face conversation and the village square. New technology is understood as an aid to relationships, not their replacement.

Chapter [-41] — The City Marketplace

Part 0 · The Backstory

Young people from the village leave for Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Delhi in search of information-technology jobs. Educated young men such as Karunakar experience financial advancement alongside a growing distance from the village's language, pond, and peepal tree. Budhba does not oppose success in the city, but urges them to stay connected to their roots. Karunakar establishes the practice of spending at least one evening each year listening to the village's stories. Returning home through memory amid migration is the centre of this chapter.

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Chapter [-40] — The Right to Information

Part 0 · The Backstory

Using the Right to Information Act, Vibha obtains old village land papers from the government archives. Comparing Yadavanand's shadow register with official records provides written evidence for many forgotten names. History that had previously survived in the village's private memory now becomes open evidence alongside government papers. Vibha keeps the documents together in a safe place. The chapter connects citizens' rights, transparency, and the practical work of safeguarding memory.

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Chapter [-39] — The Guarantee of Work

Part 0 · The Backstory

Under the rural employment-guarantee scheme, work begins on the village's ponds, embankments, and roads. Suresh keeps open records of labourers' attendance, wages, and names. When wage payments are delayed, he uses those records to demand payment from the officials. The rights of poor families can be defended through documents, organisation, and public scrutiny. Budhba's pledge to remember names takes a new form in transparent accounts of employment.

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Chapter [-38] — The Web of the Internet

Part 0 · The Backstory

Cheap internet access and smartphones connect the village's children and young people to the world, but also increase the danger of false news and contact with strangers. Under Neeraj's leadership, young people investigate the source of an inflammatory false report and expose its falsity. Budhba's story of the conch shell and silver becomes relevant again in the digital age. A group is formed to teach people how to verify information. The chapter shows that truth and illusion can appear with equal brightness on a glowing screen.

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Chapter [-37] — The First Shadow on the Screen

Part 0 · The Backstory

With the spread of Facebook and WhatsApp, the theft of photographs, rumours, and online harassment enter the village. When a young woman receives a digital threat, Sapna transforms the women's old Night Assembly into a 'Digital Night Assembly'. The young woman speaks openly about what happened, and shared support lessens her fear. The chapter portrays a new form of communal testimony and women's solidarity against anonymous violence on social media.

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Chapter [-36] — The First Hint of an Unseen Fraudster

Part 0 · The Backstory

A young man from the village loses his savings after being deceived by a fake job website and company. It is difficult to discover the fraudster's face, name, or address. Together with Budhba, Sapna comes to understand the nature of this unseen 'new crocodile'. The remedy is not fear, but verification of companies, documents, and payments. Sapna begins going from house to house to spread awareness of ways to avoid online fraud.

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Chapter [-35] — The Market in Human Bodies Opens

Part 0 · The Backstory

In Rajiv's time, fraudulent offers of jobs abroad take the form of human trafficking and bonded labour. Brokers take young men overseas and seize their passports; the son of one family remains missing. Budhba explains that checking documents and offers can save lives. Rajiv teaches young people to verify agents, contracts, and the reality of promised employment. The crisis in the narrative widens from financial fraud to the exploitation of the human body.

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Chapter [-34] — Ujjwal's Dream

Part 0 · The Backstory

When Ujjwal Jha is born into a poor family, Budhba becomes unusually restless. Villagers notice his anxiety, although no one knows clearly what the future holds. Dipali enters Ujjwal's name in the records with a special mark, and the village pays attention as the child grows up. The chapter foreshadows Ujjwal's connection with events to come, without describing the future explicitly.

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Chapter [-33] — The Shadow of the Lawyer's Coat

Part 0 · The Backstory

Batuknath, a gifted former student of the Narikel Leaf School, studies law and becomes a lawyer. At first he fights for the poor, but the lure of wealthy clients and prestige gradually draws him into defending injustice. A village widow's land dispute also reveals how his priorities have changed. Dipali and Budhba remember both his childhood honesty and his present decline. Legal knowledge can become a weapon of justice or injustice.

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Chapter [-32] — Shadows Across the Sea

Part 0 · The Backstory

Abhinav reads a newspaper report about digital financial fraud being conducted across the seas. Money stolen from the village is passing through numerous accounts and countries towards a distant 'glass tower'. Budhba connects this international network with the earlier water-crocodiles and screen-crocodiles. Abhinav warns young people to be careful about suspicious offers involving investments, jobs, and money transfers. The village's local story becomes connected to the shadow of global organised crime.

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Chapter [-31] — Satyavrat's Silence

Part 0 · The Backstory

Satyavrat Mehta notices suspicious transactions passing repeatedly through bank accounts. The money is immediately split among numerous accounts and sent in unknown directions. Budhba advises him to speak with evidence at the right time: he must neither raise a premature alarm nor remain silent in the face of injustice. Satyavrat quietly begins recording dates, amounts, and account details in a notebook. This silence will become the basis of later testimony.

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Chapter [-30] — Gop Kumar's Documents

Part 0 · The Backstory

Gop Kumar brings together Yadavanand's shadow register, old maps, government papers, and new digital records in one collection. Budhba sees in this work a new guardian of the village's long memory. When Gop Kumar finds an old, forgotten name in the register, he adds it to the new records. Gradually he understands that these are not merely documents, but the life history of an entire village. The collection is being prepared to serve as a foundation for the difficult events that lie ahead.

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Chapter [-29] — Chandrapal's Dream

Part 0 · The Backstory

Chandrapal Batra is born into a family connected with the village but living far away in Meerut. Budhba's unusual reaction surprises Gop Kumar: why is the village's memory reaching a family settled so far away? He decides to add the names of distant relations to the archive. Chandrapal becomes its first entry. The chapter hints at ancestry, names, and future networks spreading beyond the boundaries of place.

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Chapter [-28] — Raghav's Code

Part 0 · The Backstory

Born in a city, Raghav shows extraordinary talent for computers and coding from an early age. His abilities make it possible to detect complex errors and correct documents for poor families. But Gop Kumar understands that the same skill could serve good or harmful ends. He leaves a question mark beside Raghav's name. The ethical use of technological expertise becomes a question underlying later events.

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Chapter [-27] — Aruni's Construction

Part 0 · The Backstory

Aruni, a young engineer, brings the village's old flood stories and local knowledge together with modern embankment construction. He builds a new permanent embankment and warning devices; the embankment withstands a flood. Nevertheless, Aruni understands that infrastructure needs long-term maintenance, local supervision, and public vigilance. He prepares a maintenance plan for every structure. An important family foundation for Nand's later life as an engineer is laid here.

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Chapter [-26] — Devika's Songs

Part 0 · The Backstory

Devika carries forward Mohan's tradition of melodies by recording the village's old sohars, samdauns, and famine songs in the voices of elderly women. She preserves their original voices while also creating new musical arrangements. After an elderly singer dies, the recording of her voice becomes a priceless memory. Devika establishes a music department at the school. The chapter presents sound recording as a means of preserving names and experiences.

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Chapter [-25] — Meera's Privacy

Part 0 · The Backstory

Meera works in the field of digital privacy and women's safety. Witnessing cases of stolen photographs, the sale of personal information, and threats against women, she links legal assistance to Sapna's Digital Night Assembly. By helping in a case involving the misuse of a young woman's photograph, she gives the woman courage to stand against injustice. Meera educates the village's young women about information security and their rights. Privacy and dignity become new sites of struggle in the story.

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Chapter [-24] — Nishant's Bank

Part 0 · The Backstory

Nishant wants to explain bank accounts, insurance, and loans to rural families. But he sees that the complicated language of banking can become a new trap of injustice for poor farmers. Nishant explains terms and rights in plain Maithili. An elderly farmer opens his first bank account and receives an insurance benefit. Financial inclusion comes to mean not merely opening an account, but informed consent and an understanding of rights.

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Chapter [-23] — Nand's Birth

Part 0 · The Backstory

Nand is born into the family of the engineer Aruni. The unusual calm of Channa Grove and Budhba draws the attention of the villagers. Aruni vows to teach his son the importance of truth, accounts, and names. In Nand's tiny hand, Budhba senses a sign of a great responsibility in the future. The birth forms a bridge of character between the long memory of the past and the main narrative to come.

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Chapter [-22] — Approaching Twelve Hundred Years

Part 0 · The Backstory

Gop Kumar pieces together a chronology of the generations, names, and events associated with Budhba's memory. He realises that the story extends over nearly twelve hundred years, from the old debate over the conch shell and silver to the present. Through a single witness, the succession of famines, floods, wars, and social changes becomes clear. Gop Kumar carefully preserves this long chronology in the archive. 'Twelve hundred years' becomes a powerful measure of time in the village's memory.

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Chapter [-21] — Ananya's Question

Part 0 · The Backstory

Ananya, a young teacher at the Narikel Leaf School, begins teaching pupils to ask questions rather than memorise answers. Young Nand becomes her most inquisitive student. After hearing the story of the conch shell and silver, Nand asks whether people could have avoided deception by testing whether the silver was real. Ananya recognises the importance of this question. The habit of verification will become decisive in Nand's later engineering work and investigations.

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Chapter [-20] — The First Accounting of the Splash

Part 0 · The Backstory

As an engineering student, Nand hears stories of workers' insecurity, low wages, and people whose names have vanished from the papers at construction sites. Budhba tells him that a bridge should connect not only the two banks of a river but also people's names with the accounts. In his first personal diary, Nand writes, 'The crocodile eats the body, not the name.' This marks the beginning of the 'accounting of the splash'. Alongside construction, Nand adopts the purpose of safeguarding the identities of labourers.

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Chapter [-19] — Satyavrat's Decision

Part 0 · The Backstory

Senior banker Satyavrat once again examines his notebook of old, suspicious transactions. When he brings together the dates, accounts, and amounts, the outlines of an organised financial network extending overseas begin to emerge. He understands both the importance of evidence and the risks of bringing the truth to light. Budhba's teaching that 'silence can become an injustice' guides his decision. Satyavrat keeps the notebook safe and prepares for a suitable opportunity to testify.

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Chapter [-18] — Ananya and Nand Meet

Part 0 · The Backstory

After completing his education, Nand returns to the village and begins working with Ananya to modernise the school and build a digital collection of the community's heritage. Ananya's knowledge of folktales, genealogical registers, and teaching is brought together with Nand's technical skills. Together they begin tracing the forgotten names of the village and giving Gop Kumar's collection a new form. Budhba explains that this shared undertaking will be necessary in the difficult times ahead. Their meeting strengthens Nand and Ananya's partnership in the narrative.

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Chapter [-17] — The Network of the Glass Tower

Part 0 · The Backstory

News reaches the village of a multinational fraud network operated by Lau Kin-Hung from Hong Kong. False promises of employment, investment fraud, and human trafficking form different branches of the same structure. Nand and Ananya recognise connections between this network and the village's local troubles. Citing the examples of Ujjwal and Batuknath, Budhba warns of the threat that lies ahead for the village. Ananya intensifies her efforts to raise awareness.

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Chapter [-16] — Batuknath's Final Turning Point

Part 0 · The Backstory

The celebrated lawyer Batuknath Hariharan now uses hearing dates, legal procedures, and the exhaustion of witnesses to defend major figures accused of fraud. His financial success stands in contrast to the village's old ideals. Budhba tells Nand that the duty of a witness is also to record the name of a guilty person truthfully—neither granting a false pardon nor erasing the event. Nand records the full story of Batuknath, from the ideals of his childhood to his present decline, in the archive.

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Chapter [-15] — Chandrapal's Account

Part 0 · The Backstory

Drowning in gambling debts, Chandrapal Batra allows his bank account to be used for the movement of unknown funds, tempted by a commission. He does not understand the entire criminal network, yet his account becomes an important money mule. Satyavrat notices the transactions through this account. The links among Ujjwal, Batuknath, Chandrapal, and the Glass Tower begin to come together. Satyavrat gathers evidence and takes increasing precautions.

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Chapter [-14] — Construction of the Bridge

Part 0 · The Backstory

Nand is appointed to the construction of a new bridge across the Kamla-Balan. The bridge raises hopes of connecting the village to a modern city, but questions arise about workers' safety, their real names, and the contractor's negligence at the site. Budhba advises Nand to keep account of the workers' lives as carefully as he attends to the strength of the stonework. Nand records the workers' names in his diary and issues a warning. The site is foreshadowed as the setting for the coming 'splash'.

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Chapter [-13] — Gop Kumar's Compilation

Part 0 · The Backstory

The elderly Gop Kumar brings together Yadavanand's register, Haripati's manuscript, the history of the printing press, and digital documents. Different episodes, from the conch shell and silver to signs of modern criminality, begin to join into one extended story. Budhba says that this collection will be a lamp for Nand in the approaching hour of darkness. Gop Kumar hastens to give the compilation its final form, but one last chapter remains unknown.

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Chapter [-12] — The Trembling of Channa Grove

Part 0 · The Backstory

Although the wind is still, all the trees of Channa Grove suddenly begin to tremble together. The elders regard such a trembling as an omen of great calamity. Budhba explains that his existence, linked to every root in the grove, is itself sensing an approaching danger. Nand, Ananya, and the villagers become alert, but when and how the event will unfold remains unclear. The chapter ends on an intense note of foreboding.

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Chapter [-11] — Budhba's Final Blessing

Part 0 · The Backstory

On the night after the trembling, Budhba calls Nand aside and gives him a blessing that seems to pass on the burden of his long memory and responsibility. He reminds Nand that the courage of Hulasa, Sukhdev, Gauri, and all the ancestors is with him. Nand begins to see himself not merely as an engineer but as a witness for forgotten names. Even though the approaching crisis is uncertain, this conviction becomes his moral foundation.

Chapter [-10] — The First Splash at the Bridge

Part 0 · The Backstory

Amid darkness, a fierce current, and unsafe working conditions, a labourer falls into the river at the bridge construction site. Hearing the splash, Nand leaps to rescue him, but cannot save him and does not even know his real name. Budhba says that the erasure of a dead person's identity is like a second death. Nand vows to discover this worker's name and the details of other such labourers. His diary, 'The Accounting of the Splash', now becomes an instrument of actual investigation.

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Chapter [-9] — The Investigation Begins

Part 0 · The Backstory

When Nand examines the contractor's attendance records, he finds a false name and incorrect age for the worker who fell into the river. The construction company's flow of money also appears suspicious. The banker Satyavrat meets Nand and says that he has been examining this very company's accounts. They decide that Nand will investigate the identities of the workers while Satyavrat investigates the sources of the funds. A local accident becomes a clue to a vast network.

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Chapter [-8] — The Evidence Comes Out

Part 0 · The Backstory

With Gop Kumar's help, Satyavrat passes his evidence of financial transactions to journalists and an investigating agency. Ujjwal's debts, Batuknath's legal assistance, Chandrapal's account, and Lau Kin-Hung's operations abroad are revealed to be interconnected. When the report appears in the newspaper, the bereaved families learn that organised forces lie behind their suffering. Nand continues working to make the information public. The network has begun to be exposed; it has not yet been brought to an end.

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Chapter [-7] — The Experience of a Half-Ghost

Part 0 · The Backstory

Exhausted by the search for the drowned worker's name, Nand falls asleep near the peepal tree. In a dream he sees Budhba's aged, pale, indistinct figure, silently offering comfort. Upon waking, Nand listens again to his grandmother's stories of Budhua, Hulasa, and Sukhdev. He comes to feel that the memory of centuries is connected with his own present life. Whether the experience was real or a dream born of grief is left unresolved.

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Chapter [-6] — Gop Kumar's Final Page

Part 0 · The Backstory

Now extremely old, Gop Kumar finishes the last page of a lifetime's compilation of the village's history, from Vachaspati's age to the present. He entrusts his book to Nand and Ananya. The inheritance brings together a long history of names, songs, justice and injustice, and documents. Gop Kumar dies a few months later. The responsibility for guarding memory passes into the hands of the next generation.

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Chapter [-5] — The Unmasking of the Network

Part 0 · The Backstory

Months of investigation reveal Batuknath's local collaboration and the part played by Chandrapal's mule account. Legal proceedings begin against Batuknath, and Chandrapal also faces rigorous investigation. Watching Batuknath's fall, the villagers feel grief at the loss of former ideals more than satisfaction at a victory. The distant power at the centre of Lau Kin-Hung's operation remains beyond reach. Nand preserves the evidence of this incomplete victory.

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Chapter [-4] — The Final List of Names

Part 0 · The Backstory

Nand travels from village to village, comparing the contractor's discarded papers with workers' families and identity records to establish the names of the dead. All thirty names associated with the wider tragedy of 'thirty names, three hundred bodies' are entered in 'The Accounting of the Splash', together with details of their families and lives. A mother who has been waiting breaks down in tears when she sees her son's name securely recorded again. Nand understands that what is being preserved is not a set of numbers but the distinct life of each human being.

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Chapter [-3] — Twelve Hundred Years Completed

Part 0 · The Backstory

On the new-moon night that completes the cycle of twelve hundred years of memory, the villagers hold a collective kabaddi game in Channa Grove. For the first time Nand joins as a player, calling out the names of the ancestors in a loud voice. Budhba feels that the burden of safeguarding names, which he has carried alone for so long, is now being shared by the whole village. Through the gathered voices in the grove, remembrance passes permanently from the individual to the community.

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Chapter [-2] — The Next Generation's Promise

Part 0 · The Backstory

After the kabaddi game, Nand and Ananya gather the younger generation near the peepal tree and ask them to pledge to protect names and memories. Some know computers; others know songs, genealogical registers, or law. All bring their skills to a common purpose. Budhba feels reassured that the responsibility is no longer his alone. With Gop Kumar's compilation and 'The Accounting of the Splash' in their hands, Nand and Ananya stand at the threshold of the story that follows.

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Chapter [-1] — The Final Witness

Part 0 · The Backstory

One last evening, Budhba calls Nand alone to the peepal tree. He senses that every name, grief, and struggle in his memory will one day be written by an author. He does not claim to see the writer, but feels that writer close at hand; perhaps his conversation with Nand is itself an instant of storytelling. In this exceptionally brief chapter, the boundaries among witness, character, and narrator draw together. Part 0 ends here, at the threshold of the main narrative.

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Closing Note to Part 0

Part 0 · The Backstory

The long chronology of Part 0 begins with philosophical debates about error and illusion, and passes through the efforts of Hulasa, Jivanti, Sukhdev, Budhua, Gauri, and many generations to preserve names. Over time, kabaddi, song, genealogical registers, schools, night assemblies, government records, and digital documents all become means of safeguarding memory. In the final chapters, Nand and Ananya, together with Gop Kumar's compilation, carry this long tradition to the threshold of the main story.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part 1 · The Main Story

01 A Water Burial Among the Crocodiles

Chapter 0 — Garh Narikel: A Brief Folk Introduction

Part 1 · The Main Story

Before the story begins, the novelist takes the reader by the hand into the village of Garh Narikel—not to show a map, but to reveal the village's soul. Ba, the maternal voice of the entire narrative, tells the children sitting on the earth at the Narikel Leaf School that they must first listen to the village before listening to the story; otherwise, half its meaning will escape them. Twenty-four folk episodes appear, one after another—from the sohar sung at a birth and the samdaun sung when a daughter leaves her family, to songs for rice planting, funeral laments, Jhijhiya, and Kabir's nirgun verses. Through them we learn that Garh Narikel's true history lives not in books, but in song and memory. Here, for the first time, comes

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Chapter 0 — Garh Narikel: A Brief Folk Introduction

the line at the heart of the whole novel: 'The crocodile devours the body, not the name.' The body can perish and a name can be crossed out on paper, but a person is not entirely lost while the village's memory remains awake. Towards the end, there are intimations of unnamed workers such as Bisesar Paswan, Sarayu, and Chhotu, who will later move to the centre of the principal narrative. In the dedication, the author makes clear that the story is dedicated to those nameless people whose names were never engraved on stone, but whose voices still flow through water, leaves, and paper. Chapter 0 thus establishes the moral foundation of the novel.

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Chapter 1 — Kabaddi in Channa Grove

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

By day, Channa Grove in Garh Narikel seems an ordinary grove. At night, however, ghosts, spirits, rakshasas, loths, panidubbis, and witches gather there for a supernatural game of kabaddi. The referee is Budhba Ghost, who has sat on the same branch for twelve hundred years. This kabaddi is not a game but a trial: each ghost who enters the opposing half must return having saved a name, or else lose. The chapter then tells of Bisesar Paswan, a daily-wage labourer working on the site of what is described as Asia's largest road bridge over the Ganga. He climbs onto a pier, loses his footing, and falls with a splash, meeting a watery death among crocodiles. In the site's register, his death is recorded as 'absent after leaving the

Chapter 1 — Kabaddi in Channa Grove

workplace'—the first act of violence committed by the paperwork. Bisesar's name is therefore added to the ranks of the dead in Channa Grove, and is called out for the first time during the ghosts' kabaddi. The chapter introduces junior engineer Nand Aruni, the principal witness of the novel's first generation, who sees Bisesar die and changes the direction of his own life. Nand Aruni is presented as a good character who stands on the side of truth. Bisesar Paswan is an innocent worker whose death and the theft of whose name plant the seed of the entire story.

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Chapter 2 — The Village on the Right Bank

Part 1 · The Main Story 1 / 2

This chapter opens up Nand Aruni's family history. Ba, the maternal consciousness running through the novel, takes a torn gamchha from her chest, regarding it as a warning from an anonymous name. It belonged to the hands of someone who carried cement all day and was then entered in the register as 'absent'. From this piece of cloth the story of an entire village unfolds: in 1885 a boy named Kalit was born in the household of Lattar Thakur, Ba's father-in-law. Intelligent and quick to learn, Kalit soon mastered the language of English-language documents. He came to see that a person who can read letters may not be the one who tills a field, but one who writes them can change the ownership of a field someone else has tilled. This

Chapter 2 — The Village on the Right Bank

thought plants the seed of the novel's continuing conflict between paper and truth. Lattar Thakur warned his son Kalit to learn to recognise the smell of wet paper: if it smelled of money, he was not to sign. The warning passes down through the generations to Nand Aruni. When Nand detects the smell of money in the numbers on an official list of the dead, he understands that it is not a list but the mouth of a crocodile. At the end, Nand sees the word 'water burial' appear by itself in his diary, with the words 'Begin with Garh Narikel' underneath. This signals that the testimony to follow must begin in the village.

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Chapter 3 — The Accounting of the Splash

Nand Aruni's application concerning the list of the dead reaches the project office, where chief clerk Diwakar Lal, project head Shashibhushan Dev, and the foreign consultant Victor Halden all want the death toll kept 'limited'. When Nand visits the labourers' settlement, he meets Bisesar Paswan's wife. She says that if her husband had left the site, he would have taken his shoes: the shoes remain here, though the feet that wore them do not. Nand takes the shoes to the office as evidence, but the officials refuse to accept them as such. Soon he is offered an envelope of expense money; he holds it to his nose, declares that it smells of money, and hands it back, living out the teachings of his father and grandfather. During a

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Chapter 3 — The Accounting of the Splash

Part 1 · The Main Story

2 / 2

rainy night, when pressure to continue the work is high, the third bridge pier collapses. This time a woman labourer named Sarayu dies. Officially she does not exist, because she had been working in her deceased husband's name. Stunned by the injustice, Nand begins listing names in his diary under the heading 'The Accounting of the Splash': Bisesar, Sarayu, Chhotu, and others. Gradually the difference between thirty officially recorded names and three hundred actual water burials emerges. The chapter firmly establishes Shashibhushan Dev, the corrupt project head; Diwakar Lal, the indifferent clerk; and Victor Halden, the callous foreign consultant, in negative roles, while Nand Aruni and Bisesar's wife stand for justice.

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Chapter 4 — Thirty Names, Three Hundred Bodies

Part 1 · The Main Story

Nand Aruni teaches the village children to read out the names of dead labourers—Bisesar, Sarayu, Muniya, Dhanesari, Bholtun, and others. Gradually the count of three hundred comes alive in the village's shared memory, while the official papers remain fixed at thirty. Through the lawyer Devkinandan Chaubey, Nand files a petition seeking a revision of the list of the dead and recognition of women labourers. Here Satyavrat Mehta, then a junior government advocate, and Batuknath Hariharan, a senior advocate acting for the foreign contractor, enter the story for the first time. The sight of Bisesar's shoes disturbs Satyavrat for a moment, while Hariharan is adept at the art of slowing down justice. A minor broker called Chandrapal

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Chapter 4 — Thirty Names, Three Hundred Bodies

Batra also appears for the first time; he will later become the ringleader of a major digital fraud network. He offers to sell Nand 'access', but Nand refuses. In a photograph taken on the day compensation is distributed, Bisesar's wife's eyes, narrowed by the sunlight, are presented as a smile—the first sign of media manipulation. At the end of the chapter Nand is transferred, yet he takes Bisesar's shoes from the widow and continues his struggle. The episode establishes the characters on both sides of the divide between justice and injustice.

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Chapter 5 — The Crocodile of Court Dates

Part 1 · The Main Story

Nand Aruni's case begins in the district court. This chapter shows how a court date itself becomes a crocodile, slowly chewing up the witnesses, those giving evidence, and their families. Although a government lawyer, Satyavrat Mehta is troubled by Sarayu's thumbprint in the case file and privately wonders whether the law certifies convenience rather than truth. The word 'signal'—meaning the percentage to be paid as a bribe—is used for the first time between Batuknath Hariharan and Chandrapal Batra; it will become the basis of Batra's later criminal career. At every hearing Nand carries material evidence, including Bisesar's shoes and Sarayu's bangles. Eventually the objects are registered in the court's evidence storeroom: a

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Chapter 5 — The Crocodile of Court Dates

victory and a defeat in equal measure. Nand's office is burgled, and important papers disappear. But, following Ba's advice, he has already kept a second copy. This establishes the principle that 'a river does not preserve just one copy', which will become the novel's method of protecting testimony. At the end, Satyavrat quietly advises Nand not to rely on the court alone, but to make many copies. It is the first ethical turning point in Satyavrat's character.

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Chapter 6 — Harvard's Ethics

Part 1 · The Main Story 1 / 2

The story abruptly moves to Harvard University in the United States, where Ira Aruni, a young woman descended from Nand Aruni who has studied abroad, is attending a seminar on 'Global Enterprise and Human Dignity'. Onstage, Edward Broom, head of the foreign company Broom-Calder, lectures on ethics, although an earlier incarnation of that company was the foreign contractor on whose bridge Bisesar Paswan died. Ira courageously asks how many labourers died in that Indian bridge project in 1978. Broom and the organiser, Elina Graves, evade the question as a matter of the 'broader picture'. The chapter introduces Asia-Pacific adviser Raghav Somani, who will later become a key organiser of the criminal network under the name 'Raghav

Chapter 6 — Harvard's Ethics

Signal'. He regards Ira's question as a threat and alerts Chandrapal Batra. After the meeting, Ira reads an old email from her grandmother containing a scanned page from Nand Aruni's papers, and realises that Garh Narikel is no ordinary village but a court. Meanwhile in Delhi, Satyavrat Mehta writes a note requesting the original records of the old bridge project. The chapter binds three worlds—Harvard, Delhi, and the criminal network's inner circles—into a single thread and establishes Ira Aruni as a representative of a new generation fighting for justice.

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Chapter 7 — The Price of Breath

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 3

During the pandemic in 2020, a new crisis reaches both Garh Narikel and the city. Nand Aruni's daughter Ananya, who will later become a principal child character, is still young. On the phone, Ba advises that the names of those who die of the disease and those who die for lack of medicine should be recorded separately; otherwise, everyone will be classified as 'other'. The chapter introduces Gop Kumar, a quiet internal auditor who will become a major investigator in the next part of the novel. In the files of a company called Jeevanrekha Bio-Logistics, he discovers discrepancies in invoices for oxygen and medicines and is startled to find a connection with the old bridge project behind the code 'NR-77'. At the end of the file he

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Chapter 7 — The Price of Breath

finds the name Broom-Calder Group, showing that the same foreign company has practised a similar form of exploitation from the bridge project to pandemic medicines. Meanwhile Ujjwal Jha, an unemployed young man in Garh Narikel, begins falling into an online gambling app. His sister Devika Sah warns him that it is not a game but a trap; Devika emerges as one of the most alert and courageous young characters in the novel. The company curtails Gop Kumar's authority because he asks too many questions, but he has already preserved a secret copy. At the close, a mysterious and anonymous informant, Ishan Dutt, who is officially recorded as dead, makes contact with Gop for the first time and advises him to divide the papers into three

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Chapter 7 — The Price of Breath

parts for safekeeping.

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Chapter 8 — The Crocodile on the Screen

This chapter tells the tragic story of Ujjwal Jha's death. Ujjwal sinks ever deeper into a gambling app called 'Raja-Rati': first small wins, then heavy losses, then debt. Chandrapal Batra and Raghav 'Signal' Somani are behind the operation, arranging for young people to win at first and then trapping them into supplying mule bank accounts. Innocent villagers such as Munna Paswan unknowingly hand over their accounts to the network. Finally Ujjwal receives a fraudulent 'digital arrest' threat. A fake police officer tells him over the phone that terrorist transactions have occurred through his account; terrified of disgrace, Ujjwal loses the family's jewellery and savings. Devika Sah tries to save him, but Ujjwal dies by suicide on

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Chapter 8 — The Crocodile on the Screen

Part 1 · The Main Story

the bank of the Balan. This is one of the most heartrending deaths in the novel, yet the police dismiss it as 'suicide' and the bank as 'suspicious transactions'. That night Ujjwal's spirit reaches Channa Grove, but under the spell of the screen he cannot speak his own name until Hulasi, a supernatural female ghost, touches his forehead and brings him to his senses, saying, 'Leave the numbers; speak your name.' Devika delivers Ujjwal's phone to Gop Kumar. It reveals the connections among Munna Paswan's account, Raghav Somani, Lau Kin-Hung—the Hong Kong-based foreign organiser named here for the first time—and Batuknath Hariharan. Batra and Hariharan take on more prominent negative roles, while Gop Kumar and Devika Sah emerge as

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Chapter 8 — The Crocodile on the Screen

new voices of resistance.

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Chapter 9 — The Market in Human Bodies

A second file recovered from Ujjwal’s phone exposes another, more terrifying network: a human-trafficking and sex-trade operation concealed behind a bogus charity called the Surya-Ashraya Seva Samiti, headed by Malvika Green. Phoolmati, a poor girl from Madhubani, identified in the file only as “F.M.”, is brought to the city with a false promise of a job caring for elderly people. Her phone is taken, she is threatened with debt, and she is locked in a hotel room where influential men such as Batuknath Hariharan spend their nights. Phoolmati refuses to put her thumbprint on a document. Seeing the face of her dead grandmother in the mirror gives her courage. Meanwhile, the researcher Soumya Ramanathan has been invited to a

Chapter 9 — The Market in Human Bodies

“Dialogue on Women’s Dignity” in the same hotel. Using Ishan Dutt’s secret software, Gop Kumar alerts Soumya to Phoolmati’s danger. Soumya boldly tells the journalists to “Go live,” has Phoolmati’s room broken open, and Phoolmati comes out publicly calling out her real name. It is the novel’s first unambiguous public victory in which a victim regains her name. In Channa Grove, Hulasi connects this triumph with her own name and runs on Phoolmati’s side of the kabaddi field, suggesting that the struggles of dead and living women are bound by a single thread. At the end, Gop Kumar sets up three columns in his file—fear, payment, and protection. The names Batra, Somani, Lau Kin-Hung, and Hariharan appear under payment and protection,

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Chapter 9 — The Market in Human Bodies

while Satyavrat Mehta's name is entered in a separate column, marked with a question mark. This hints that a voice for justice may also arise from within the system.

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Chapter 10 — Blackmail Through Privacy

The lines of the ghosts’ kabaddi field in Channa Grove change. Panidubbi traces a shining line with her wet hair; when a ghost crosses it, a hidden memory opens. Hulasi sees again the night at the well and declares courageously, “This is not my shame; it is the village’s lie.” In Delhi a new character enters Gop Kumar’s files: Mrinalini Arya, called Meera, an expatriate technology-law adviser, a distant female descendant of the Garh Narikel lineage, who loves a woman named Aditi. Chandrapal Batra’s gang steals Meera and Aditi’s private messages and travel receipts and threatens them: “Stay away from Gop’s files, or we will send everything to your family, the media, and the university.” Meera is frightened, but Aditi encourages

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Chapter 10 — Blackmail Through Privacy

her by telephone: “Those who turn evidence of love into a document of crime are the greater cowards.” Meera gives Gop the evidence on the condition that the case concern not homosexuality but an attack on privacy and a criminal network. At Hariharan’s office, Batra and Raghav Somani devise their strategy: “Defame first; data is the final weapon.” A mysterious drop of water on the table forms the word “name”; Batra wipes it away in fear. Back in the village, Ba discovers Meera’s name in an old genealogy and says, “A daughter of the family who writes her own name cannot be cut off by society.” Meera bravely writes a statement: “The crime is that criminals turn privacy into a weapon of fear.” Aditi refuses to have her name removed.

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Chapter 10 — Blackmail Through Privacy

The next morning Meera records a video statement and connects Ujjwal Jha’s death to the same network. The mysterious informer Ishan Dutt appears and warns that the original phone must be secured. At the end, the ghosts’ line disappears from the earth of Channa Grove, but the inner boundary remains firm: three lamps are lit again—“name, love, testimony.”

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Chapter 11 — The Black River of Money

Part 1 · The Main Story

The kabaddi ground in Channa Grove turns into a ledger, with account numbers shining where the ghosts’ footprints had been. Ishan Dutt brings a second memory device and opens a financial network called “Dhara” (“Current”). The criminals give their accounts river names—Kamla, Balan, Ganga, and Mekong—and use “Prayer” as the code name for terror financing. On the screen, Gop Kumar reads evidence relating to the bridge-project fraud, counterfeit supplies during the coronavirus pandemic, online gambling, mule accounts, and digital-arrest scams. The roles of Chandrapal Batra, who studied law in Meerut and enjoys Batuknath Hariharan’s protection, and Raghav “Signal” Somani, the agent of the Hong Kong kingpin Lau Kin-Hung, become clear.

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Chapter 11 — The Black River of Money

Devika learns that the death of her brother Ujjwal, recorded as suicide, was in reality a death to which he had been driven: his money had been divided among thirty-five fake accounts. Mrinalini, or Meera, connects the cases with the words, “The master of fear is the same.” Ishan proposes breaking four “dams”: the court, public memory, the international platform, and the shame of ordinary people. A mysterious wet envelope reaches Satyavrat Mehta: “Not thirty names, but three hundred. Not debt, but a push. Not trade, but a black river.” Gop makes three copies of the memory device—one for Mehta, one for Ira Aruni abroad, and one to be kept inside a hollow of the peepal tree in Channa Grove—so that, “If all the courts turn away, the

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Chapter 11 — The Black River of Money

village ghosts will still know where the river of money flowed from.” At the end Budhba’s ghost says that the kabaddi players must now cross accounts, files, screens, courts, and overseas platforms. The four faces of Brahma in the peepal tree speak: “Name. Evidence. Memory. Courage.”

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Chapter 12 — The Narikel Leaf on the Dark Web

Part 1 · The Main Story

The third copy of the device, kept in the hollow of the peepal tree, emits a green light. Gop Kumar, Soumya, Ramaiyya, Mrinalini, and Devika confirm the distribution of the three copies: the first is already with Satyavrat Mehta, the second is destined for Ira Aruni at Harvard, and the third remains secure in the tree. Reading the lies in a government affidavit—that the safety inspection was complete and that the families could not be traced—Mehta feels shame rather than anger. He writes in his diary: “The government’s position and the soul of the state: if they part company, whom must a lawyer stand beside?” In America, Ira Aruni, an expatriate descendant of the Garh Narikel family, receives a file from an unknown sender

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Chapter 12 — The Narikel Leaf on the Dark Web

entitled “The Names of Garh Narikel.” It contains the names of Lattar Thakur, Kalit, and Nand Aruni, photographs of the bridge, and excerpts from Edward Broom’s speech. She resolves to ask an incisive question during Broom’s ethics lecture. Ishan Dutt identifies a fourth direction, the dark web, and makes clear that the criminal method will not be set down: only the fact that the truth exists will be recorded, with limits designed to protect the dignity of victims. Batuknath Hariharan dreams that the courtroom floor has turned into a crocodile’s back. He awakens in fear and speaks with Chandrapal Batra and Raghav “Signal”; the news that three copies have escaped unsettles them all. On Batra’s telephone Ujjwal’s photograph appears

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Chapter 12 — The Narikel Leaf on the Dark Web

without explanation, together with the words “Not debt, but a push.” Gop dreams of the memory device being passed instead of the ball in the ghosts’ kabaddi game. Upon waking, he adds to each file a list defining the dignity of victims and the limits of publication. At the end, the veins of the peepal leaves form a map joining the village, Delhi, Harvard, and Hong Kong in one line. Brahma says, “The world has come inside the village.” For the first time a narikel leaf floats on the black river instead of sinking.

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Chapter 13 — The Sealed Cover

Part 1 · The Main Story

In the morning Satyavrat Mehta identifies falsehoods in his government affidavit and types an explanatory note on an old typewriter. In Courtroom Five the case is called: “Families of Workers and Others versus the State and Others.” Batuknath Hariharan and Chandrapal Batra try to delay the proceedings through procedural objections involving admissibility, privacy, and national security. The judge remarks with disdain, “You have shut seven doors in a single breath.” Mehta rises and declares, “If the state rests upon incomplete records, then it rests upon untruth.” He demands the preservation of evidence and insists that the lists of names remain open: if truth is kept in complete darkness, it falls once again into the hands of

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Chapter 13 — The Sealed Cover

those from whom it is being protected. The judge orders that sensitive personal details be sealed, but the lists of names, the status of deaths, and the protection of records remain public. Mehta asks permission to read the names of the dead in court. He begins with the first thirty officially recognised names; as he reads the second list, of people for whose “death or disappearance the state’s records are silent,” his voice fails. Devika Sah joins the proceedings as a party and secures permission for Gop Kumar to read the remaining names. Gop reads steadily, with a pause after each name that feels like a funeral rite. Heavy silence, not applause, fills the room. The court orders the safeguarding of records, immediate hearings

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Chapter 13 — The Sealed Cover

concerning threats against witnesses, and an independent audit. Hariharan understands that this is not the end of his defence, but the “first crack.” At Harvard, Ira receives the message “The names were read in court,” closes her eyes, and hears the sound of kabaddi in Garh Narikel. In Hong Kong a green dot appears for the first time over Garh Narikel on Lau Kin-Hung’s map. He observes, “Small villages are the most dangerous, because names survive there by word of mouth.” At the close a water stain shaped like a crocodile’s tooth remains on the empty courtroom floor, refusing to dry; within it, a name glimmers until dawn.

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Chapter 14 — The Road Home

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 4

As everyone leaves the court, they find a strange dampness on their shoes and the smell of soil and Ganga sand. Satyavrat Mehta rejects his government car and walks. Speaking to journalists, Batuknath Hariharan says, “The procedure will take its course,” while the mysterious message “Clean house” appears on Chandrapal Batra’s phone. The group decides to return to Garh Narikel before the next hearing, scheduled in fifteen days. On the train Ba tells Soumya a figurative story of the Kamla-Balan: “Even the crimes of a quiet river proceed quietly.” On reaching the village, Ira Aruni receives Ba’s blessing as Ba rests a hand on her head. Nishant gives Gop three-tier information on the route taken by payments—Jaipur, Gurugram,

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Chapter 14 — The Road Home

Singapore, and Hong Kong. That evening villagers gather silently beneath the peepal tree. There is no stage, only lanterns. Touching the earth, Gop says, “Those whose names are not on paper will have their names placed on the soil today.” Ishan Dutt brings three bundles: a list of workers, a list of digital-fraud victims, and a record of overseas money routes. “These are the bones of the names,” he says. Ba says that bones are consigned to water, but Gop replies, “This time not to the water; to the tree’s roots.” Copies of all the evidence are buried in a brass box beside the roots of a narikel tree, like a planting of testimony. That night the ghosts’ kabaddi in Channa Grove resounds with clearly spoken names—Sarayu, Nagina,

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Chapter 14 — The Road Home

Ujjwal, Hulasi. At midnight blue light rises from the roots, forming and dissolving letters; in Ira’s Harvard booklet, Edward Broom’s face grows faint and turns into the cracked palm of a worker. At dawn minute letters become visible on a narikel leaf. Ba says, “If the tree dies, the seed will remain.” In the district town, Hariharan dreams of saying “date” instead of “kabaddi.” Batra receives the message “Remove the names,” but sees his own name shining on a trembling leaf beyond the window. At the end, everyone hears the dawn birdsong as though it were a proclamation, and numerous figures appear through the mist, coming towards the village from the Kamla-Balan. The true homecoming will be complete only when those absent from

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Chapter 14 — The Road Home

the records are declared present in court.

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Chapter 15 — The Water of Names

Part 1 · The Main Story

Satyavrat Mehta comes to court carrying, instead of a government document, a dried narikel leaf from home. On it are minute letters spelling the names absent from the official list. He reads seven lists in order: the thirty official names; those marked “absent”; those described as “deaths outside the workplace”; those with forged signatures; those whose compensation was stolen; those whose names were changed; and the names of labourers who had never been formally registered as born. During the reading, Gop Kumar’s list of victims of digital fraud, including Ujjwal Jha, is also read aloud. Mrinalini herself rises and authorises public disclosure of the threats and blackmail she has faced: “My dignity is in my life, not in their

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Chapter 15 — The Water of Names

threat.” The judge makes a historic order: a special investigation, an independent audit, suspension of Chandrapal Batra’s accounts, notice concerning the conduct of Hariharan as president of the Bar Council, and another hearing in only seven days. Hariharan seems to sink into himself; Batra’s phone goes dead; Lau Kin-Hung shuts down his screen. At Harvard, Professor Elina Graves cancels her next lecture organised by Edward Broom’s foundation and asks the students to bring with them the name of a person who has been made absent.

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Chapter 16 — The Court of Channa Grove

Part 1 · The Main Story

News of the court’s ruling reaches Garh Narikel through water: names shine in the women’s water vessels. That night, instead of kabaddi, an otherworldly “court” gathers in Channa Grove. Its judge is not a single embodied person: the judge is whatever truth has been suppressed most often. The dead are called and appear one by one. First come workers who underwent water burial—Sarayu, Makhna, Bisesar. Then comes Ujjwal, the young man killed by the screen, who offers his telephone to Devika; she tells him, “I will speak your name, not take your phone.” Next come the victims of the trafficking market and violations of privacy, with Meera bearing witness through her silence, and then those who died during the coronavirus period. The

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Chapter 16 — The Court of Channa Grove

criminals—Hariharan, Batra, Raghav, Lau, and Broom—do not attend in person, but their shadows appear as files, screens, deleted messages, percentage signs, and a wet lectern. From its four faces Brahma in the peepal tree pronounces a poetic “judgment”: whoever traded in bodies must search for names all his life; whoever sold court dates will have his sleep turned into an unfinished hearing; and so on. At dawn Hariharan, Batra, Broom, and Lau each find some small supernatural sign in their own homes—a dripping of water, an illegible message, a wet speech manuscript. This is the close of the first great symbolic cycle of Part One.

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Chapter 17 — The Grief of Victory

Part 1 · The Main Story

Even after his courtroom victory, Batuknath Hariharan finds no peace. Night after night water drips beneath his pillow. A function is held in his honour, but the word “date” repeatedly sounds through the microphone during his speech. The real turning point is that Gop Kumar, Soumya, Devika, Meera, Ira, and Aruni do not return to court, file an appeal, or hold a press conference. They have all gone “to work.” Devika sits at the pond steps, teaching young people how to avoid digital-arrest fraud. Meera and Soumya begin women’s circle meetings based on the principle that “shame belongs to the criminal, not the victim.” Ira starts creating an archive called the “House of Memory.” Chandrapal Batra realises that this silence is more

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Chapter 17 — The Grief of Victory

dangerous than uproar: police officers, lawyers, and judges may be bought, but public awareness cannot. At the feast celebrating his victory, Hariharan feels alone. A victory needs to see the defeated faces of the people it has overcome, and there are no such faces before him. Finally he stands on the courthouse steps, inwardly demanding, “Come back, appeal, fight,” only to hear a child’s voice from a distance: “Sarayu ... Ujjwal ... do not strike out the names.” He listens with his hands clapped over his ears.

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Chapter 18 — The Empty Courtroom

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

On the fourth day the court opens, but no one appears for the petitioners. The attendance column remains empty. Hariharan calls this “contempt,” while Satyavrat Mehta argues that absence does not always mean neglect: sometimes people outside the court do the very work the court could not do. A drop of water falls onto the judge’s pen and forms the letters “Sarayu”; he grants another adjournment. On the veranda, Hariharan and Chandrapal Batra plan to accuse Satyavrat, Gop, Soumya, Devika, Meera, and Ira of defamation, contempt, and foreign funding. Their lawyers repeatedly explain, however, that no public statement or accusation has been made on which to base a lawsuit: these people are creating alternatives, not making

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Chapter 18 — The Empty Courtroom

allegations. Meanwhile, beneath the trees of Channa Grove in Garh Narikel, an informal school gathers, writing names on stones. Devika organises the young people, and Meera and Soumya organise the women. Lau Kin-Hung's shadow in Hong Kong tells Chandrapal bluntly: "I do not want Indian law; I want money. If a village girl is teaching people to end a call, your legal victory is a defeat for me." At the end, a cleaner comes to the courthouse in the morning and writes his father's name in dust on a bench. The father had once been recorded as having "left his work and gone away." This is the first spontaneous citizen's record in the empty courtroom.

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Chapter 19 — The Register of Names

Part 1 · The Main Story

A formal public archive, the village’s own “register of names,” is established in Garh Narikel. Sarayu Devi’s granddaughter comes first, carrying a broken piece of bangle and a faded photograph. Meera makes ink from turmeric, kohl, and Ganga water; Aruni writes the first entry: “Sarayu Devi.” Then dozens of names are added, among them Kanhaiya Paswan, whose signature continued to be used after his death, Mansur Ali, Phulo Mandal, and Ganeshi Sada. Four principles are established: first, record the name spoken at home rather than only the official name; second, include not merely victims of old water burials but also those harmed by screens, the trafficking market, blackmail, and the pandemic; third, where someone does not wish to

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Chapter 19 — The Register of Names

be named, use only a marker, such as “a young woman, Darbhanga”; fourth, preserve a place for silence itself. Ira proposes sending a copy abroad, but Ba insists that the first copy remain there: “The soil that heard the names has the first right.” Raghav “Signal” sends people to take photographs, but the cameras of all their mobile phones fill with water. At night the ghosts themselves read the leaves one by one and declare, “I am present.” In the morning a narikel leaf mysteriously appears on the veranda of Satyavrat Mehta’s government residence. Reading it, he understands that the next hearing will be not in court but in the memory of the nation. At the end, a bell-like sound rises from a narikel leaf and Ba proclaims: “The

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Chapter 19 — The Register of Names

school of names is open.”

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Chapter 20 — The School Against the Screen

On the day after the register of names is established, the first informal class meets beside the leaves of Channa Grove. It has neither building nor official recognition. Devika Sah teaches the full story of Ujjwal Jha as a lesson: the wins, then losses, then debt, then the threat of a “digital arrest.” Nishant Jha, a young man who has worked abroad in financial technology, explains to the children that the crocodile on the screen has four legs: greed, fear, shame, and loneliness. Ba connects this to the tricks of the old witch, who warned, “Do not tell anyone at home”; the witch has now become a screen. Meera and Devika establish two rules: “Do not remain alone” and “Let the criminal bear the shame.” Nishant admits publicly that

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Chapter 20 — The School Against the Screen

he himself was once part of the industry: “I did not know as much as I could have known, but I will not run away now.” A cousin of Munna Paswan stops just before opening a bank account and comes to the school. He is called not “foolish” but “saved.” Batuknath Hariharan threatens a public-interest lawsuit against the school, but discovers that it has no registration, president, or building. To whom can notice be served? A postman brings a notice, which Ba “signs” with a fibre from a narikel leaf. At the end, a line grows of its own accord on a leaf: “Fear that is shared ceases to be fear.” The village acquires a new greeting: “You are not alone, are you?”

Chapter 21 — The Oath of Privacy

After Ujjwal’s name enters the register, Devika realises that society does not forgive the dead; instead, it makes their death their own fault. Soumya Ramanathan returns from Delhi and organises a formal “oath of privacy.” Meera, or Mrinalini, who was blackmailed because of her loving relationship, now stands openly before the assembly. Soumya draws a circle on the earth and writes “privacy,” Devika writes “fraud,” and Meera writes “shame.” Munna Paswan, a victim of the mule-account network, and two other women—a nurse and a bank employee who have received threats—tell their stories. The central sentence of the oath becomes: “The shame shall belong to the criminal, not to the victim.” Watching a broadcast from abroad, Ira

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Chapter 21 — The Oath of Privacy

understands that “morality is born wherever frightened people cease blaming one another.” Nishant also admits that he saw people’s fear, greed, and loneliness being measured inside the payment channels. Ujjwal’s mother speaks in public for the first time, acknowledging her sorrow at leaving her son alone. The final line of the oath is, “We will not allow anyone’s love to be used as evidence against them.” At the end, the children write on the school wall: “Silence is the fraudster’s first earning.”

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Chapter 22 — Harvard’s Second Lecture

Part 1 · The Main Story

Edward Broom delivers another lecture on ethics in Cambridge. This time Ira does not question him directly. Instead, she sits outside on the steps and uses her laptop to connect a live broadcast from Garh Narikel, where Ananya and the children are reading the register: “Sarayu Devi”—“Present”; “Ujjwal Jha”—“Present”; and so on. Through a technical disturbance, their voices also reach the screen inside the lecture hall. Instead of pictures of the bridge, names written on wet leaves appear. Broom panics. Professor Elina Graves rises and walks out. Ira deliberately remains silent: asking a question from the podium creates a controversy; reading names is truth. After the lecture, Broom sees an illegible shadow of a narikel leaf in

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Chapter 22 — Harvard’s Second Lecture

the corridor. Elina asks Ira, “What can we do?” Ira answers, “Leave the stage. When they next come to lecture on ethics, leave the stage empty; an empty stage will speak louder than their lectures.” At the end, Broom changes his company’s name, but the children of Garh Narikel laugh: “Changing a name does not change a crocodile’s teeth.”

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Chapter 23 — Batuknath’s Search

Part 1 · The Main Story

Despite his legal victory, no one comes to Batuknath Hariharan’s door: no plea for forgiveness, no settlement, no new case. The empty doorway frightens him more than noise. He goes to Garh Narikel himself without announcement, expecting a village headman or broker to bow at his feet. At the edge of the village, however, children are drawing a “screen crocodile” in lime. Near Channa Grove there is no stage or banner, only children drying leaves. A little girl asks him, “Is your name written here? A person who can save his own name does not need someone else to write it.” Ananya teaches him “waiting,” something he had long taught others through the court. Devika, Meera, and Gop Kumar explain one by one that their language has

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Chapter 23 — Batuknath’s Search

changed: not “case” but “name”; not “compensation” but “dignity.” Aruni is busy making a new hollow near the narikel tree instead of negotiating. Batuknath displays a blank document for a “settlement,” but Ananya folds it into a boat and sets it on the pond. The boat soaks and sinks, because “water does not keep a paper that has no name.” By evening he understands that these people have not been defeated but liberated, and there is no broker for free people. In the car on his way back, the paper of his victory softens in his hand; a new sentence appears within the ink: “Appeal against whom?”

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Chapter 24 — The Novel Begins Again

In the morning the children begin playing kabaddi themselves in Channa Grove in place of the ghosts, but the rule has changed: a child crossing the line must speak the name of a dead person, and the child’s breath is preserved. Somit, Munna’s nephew, calls Ujjwal’s name. A little girl calls Sarayu’s and places her palm on the soil, an act Devika calls “the signature of the unschooled, made by the earth.” Meanwhile a sentence appears on the court victory document in Batuknath’s cupboard: “Public work begun.” Chandrapal Batra admits that the opening of new mule accounts has fallen over the last seven days. An elderly woman laughs at a digital-arrest call and hangs up. On Lau Kin-Hung’s screen a “red line,” the seed of resistance,

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Chapter 24 — The Novel Begins Again

spreads outwards from Garh Narikel. Satyavrat Mehta receives a file entitled “The Legal Status of Community Archives” and writes, “The state does not own memory.” In the evening the adults also enter a final kabaddi game—Devika, Meera, Nishant, Soumya, Gop, and Aruni each speak their own resolve. Budhba’s ghost crosses the line himself and announces, “The novel begins again.” Hulasi’s hand becomes visible for the first time, and she writes the letter “go” on the ground. At the end of the night a fruit falls from the narikel tree; from a hollow inside comes a leaf bearing the words, “Where names are read, the story does not end.” Aruni hands his notebook to Ananya and tells her, “You write.” Ananya writes the next opening sentence

Chapter 24 — The Novel Begins Again

of the story herself. The chapter makes it clear that the rogues have not disappeared: the app starts running again, and Lau establishes a new company. This is not the end of evil, but the beginning of learning to recognise it.

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Chapter 25 — A Mind Left Hanging

Despite the courtroom victory, the victory order shut inside Batuknath Hariharan’s cupboard rustles through the night. Sand gathers at the edge of the paper to form the words “Mind Left Hanging.” Batuknath calls Chandrapal Batra in the middle of the night to ask whether any legal remedy could stop the reading of names. Batra concedes that reading names is no crime. In parallel, the words “first mule” grow on the glass of Batra’s framed degree; he connects them with the memory of his forgotten first victim, a student from Meerut. Digital “leaves” fall across Raghav “Signal” Somani’s phone. Lau Kin-Hung sees an indicator stuck on the Garh Narikel point of his map and orders, “Buy the names,” a command Raghav cannot understand.

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Chapter 25 — A Mind Left Hanging

Edward Broom sends Professor Elina Graves a message that is half-written and half-erased. Satyavrat Mehta reads the register of names in Garh Narikel by night and writes, “The state is not the owner of citizens’ memories.” All the tricksters have different dreams: in Ananya’s dream, Batuknath hunts for defendants who have gone “to work”; Devika dreams of Ujjwal; and Meera dreams of a marketplace where privacy is sold. In Batuknath’s cupboard a grey shadow appears on the paper—his own exhausted likeness. Finally Ananya understands that “the mind of falsehood has arrived in the grove”: the minds of all the rogues have begun travelling towards Garh Narikel ahead of their bodies.

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Chapter 26 — Batuknath Hariharan’s Journey

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

Batuknath Hariharan cancels all meetings and decides to travel to Garh Narikel by train rather than helicopter, his first railway journey in years. As soon as the journey begins, a mysterious old man climbs into the carriage. Instead of a ticket he shows a narikel leaf, and the ticket examiner cannot see him. It is later made clear that this is Budhba’s ghost himself in disguise. During the journey the old man asks Batuknath searching questions: “Have you read the names?” and “Paper is evidence, and so is its absence.” He awakens a childhood memory of Batuknath’s father teaching him to remember the name of a poor client. The old man smells “the odour of a bribe” on the victory order. At night he alights at an unknown halt, and

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Chapter 26 — Batuknath Hariharan’s Journey

Part 1 · The Main Story

Batuknath’s “shadow” gets off with him: symbolically, his mind separates from his body and reaches Garh Narikel. In the morning the old man appears again at a junction, with his heels an inch above the ground. On the rough road to the village, Batuknath has to take off his shoes and enter Channa Grove barefoot: “Here we remove not shoes but arrogance.” The chapter closes with Batuknath inside the grove, where the reading of names continues, and Ananya asking him, “Will you read a name?” The answer is left for the next chapter.

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Chapter 27 — Chandrapal Batra’s Screen

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

Chandrapal Batra decides not to go to Garh Narikel. His empire is a glass room with three screens: a gambling dashboard, a list of mule accounts, and signal messages. He creates a folder called “Local Narrative” and plans to discredit the village’s story as superstition and political incitement. But when he types “register of names,” the shadow of a narikel leaf appears on the screen. In his nightly earnings table Ujjwal Jha’s name bears a red mark. He deletes it, only for the names Munna Paswan, Ritesh Kumar, Sohail Ansari, and others to appear one after another. He summons technical staff, but one young employee admits, “Sir, this does not look like malicious software. The names seem to be repeating themselves.” Raghav Somani

Chapter 27 — Chandrapal Batra’s Screen

comes in person to say the Hong Kong accounts have fallen “silent.” At night, on Batra’s switched-off screens, a child appears and asks, “How did you give the first win?” and “Why did the account continue after the account holder died?” Batra says, “I did not commit murder,” but the reply comes: “Then which crime will you admit?” In the morning the letters inside the frame of his Meerut law degree change to “Education in reading names remains incomplete.” At the close he admits that Channa Grove has entered not only the village but the network itself.

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Chapter 28 — The Silence of Raghav Signal

An unfamiliar silence settles in Raghav Somani’s apartment, a silence he has not manufactured. A message arrives from Lau Kin-Hung: “Accounts suspended.” The words are strikingly different from Lau’s usual coded instructions. Raghav’s old printer starts by itself and prints the names of the dead and the victims—Ujjwal Jha, Munna Paswan, and Sarayu the woman labourer. His childhood background is revealed: in his father’s hardware shop, the credit ledger taught him, “Writing names is foolishness; keep accounts.” This belief became the foundation of his criminal business, a network of fragmented mule accounts. At night the memory of his first victim, a student whose name he cannot recall, torments him. The blank left by that

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Chapter 28 — The Silence of Raghav Signal

forgotten name breaks something within him. He smashes his SIM cards and finally makes a file in which he discovers the victim’s name: Arunesh Kumar. In the morning he goes to the old student hostel where the fraud took place. The tea seller still remembers: “The father sold his shop; the boy became almost mad.” The endurance of popular memory shakes Raghav. At the end Lau orders the old routes reopened, but Raghav’s fingers type, “A list of names is being prepared.” This is the first sign of his change.

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Chapter 29 — Lau Kin-Hung’s Dream

Part 1 · The Main Story

In his glass house in Hong Kong, Lau Kin-Hung, who never dreams but has only “projections,” has a terrifying dream. Water rises inside his house, and floating mobile phones carry Ujjwal Jha, Sarayu, and innumerable victims of digital-arrest fraud, all asking the same question: “In which country’s accounts was the profit from our death or loss recorded?” Four crocodiles surround him, symbolising the bridge accident, the court, Harvard, and profits from the pandemic. The dream changes into a Harvard auditorium, where the amount of profit appears beneath every word of Edward Broom’s speech. At last Budhba’s ghost, seated on a branch of the peepal tree, tells Lau, “Your accounts are very clean. Only one column is missing: sleep.” Lau

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Chapter 29 — Lau Kin-Hung’s Dream

wakes and learns from his assistant Mei Lan that Raghav is out of contact, Chandrapal is anxious, and Hariharan has gone to Garh Narikel. A narikel leaf appears spontaneously on his desk. When he touches it he feels a heartbeat, and the words come: “Now your mind is left hanging.” At the end he orders Raghav’s access closed, Batra’s payments stopped, and Hariharan’s expenses separated. Ostensibly these are business decisions, but in truth they are attempts to escape his dream. They fail: at dusk a crocodile, this time holding a sheet of paper in its mouth, appears swimming across the sea towards his home.

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Chapter 30 — The Court Within the Rogues

On the same night all five rogues—Batuknath Hariharan, Chandrapal Batra, Raghav “Signal,” Lau Kin-Hung, and, explicitly for the first time, Edward Broom—awaken simultaneously in their separate rooms, without any summons. Names of the dead emerge through the word “set aside” on Batuknath’s victory order; a child, symbolising childhood, asks him to read them. On Chandrapal’s screen the names of mule-account holders appear of their own accord. A passbook tells him, “Consent given through hunger and consent recognised by law are not the same.” Leaves fall in Raghav’s room despite the closed windows, bearing unfinished sentences from the gambling-fraud messages he sent. In Lau Kin-Hung’s glass house a table grows up, supporting bowls

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Chapter 30 — The Court Within the Rogues

containing blood, medicine, and broken glass. A voice asks, “What is your share in death?” Mud streams from the edges of the word “dignity” in the draft of Broom’s speech. In the inner courtroom of all five there is an empty chair: the chair of those they defeated. The question is asked, “Where are those you defeated?” The answer comes: in Channa Grove, in the school, on the leaves, in mobile phones, and outside the auditorium. In the morning none of the five receives punishment, only waiting.

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Chapter 31 — The Work of the Defeated

After the judgment of that night in Channa Grove, the victims’ side goes not to revenge but to work. Ananya erases the dividing line on the kabaddi ground and announces, “Whoever is called defeated will be given another task.” Devika Sah carries Ujjwal’s broken phone to the old village meeting place and writes the first lesson. Nishant Jha teaches the children the language of mule accounts. Soumya Ramanathan translates the cruel terminology of government documents —“unreported death,” “procedural delay”—into the village’s speech. Meera repeats the public oath: “No one’s love shall be evidence against them.” Abroad, Ira starts a gathering called “Leaf Readings.” Gop Kumar and Ishan Dutt turn data into stories and establish the

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Chapter 31 — The Work of the Defeated

principle of leaving an “empty space” where no dream or account can be found. News reaches the rogues that their opponents are making no appeal, allegation, or public rally: they are only teaching, which is difficult to prosecute. At the end, old chests begin to open in every village home, and old documents become collective memory. “Those who leave the fight and turn to work cannot be defeated.”

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Chapter 32 — The Third Kabaddi

An unmarked kabaddi circle forms of its own accord in the middle of Channa Grove. Three teams meet there: the dead—Sarayu, Nand Aruni, workers, Ujjwal, and others, speaking their names; the children, whose spoken word is “question”; and the disembodied minds of the five rogues, speaking their old words: “procedure,” “account,” “message,” “percentage,” and “dignity.” The length of each player’s breath depends upon the word spoken. Batuknath’s “adjournment” gives him a short breath; Ananya’s “question” draws a deep one. Munna Paswan stands and tells Chandrapal, “My name is not mule. I am Munna.” Finally, the minds of all five rogues leave the circle, but each must leave behind one word—“procedure,” “account,” “message,” “share,” or

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Chapter 32 — The Third Kabaddi

“dignity.” The words remain in Channa Grove, where their meanings change. An “account,” for example, becomes a human life story. By morning all five rogues find that the taste of their old words has altered. At the end it is understood that “kabaddi does not finish; its breath changes,” and the game begins again.

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Chapter 33 — The Test of the Minds

After the first breath of the “third kabaddi” ends, the minds of the five rogues are seated inside a circular ring to be tested. Ananya makes the rule: whoever has struck out a name must pronounce that name in full or cannot leave the circle. Names such as “Sarayu Devi” and “Lakhan Paswan” slip unbidden onto Batuknath’s tongue. Chandrapal is asked, “Who is your real master?” and “Why were messages coming from Hong Kong?” The light on his screen begins to crack. Munna Paswan appears again in person and repeats his own name. Each of Raghav’s breaths saying “Erase” shakes another leaf loose. Meera tells him plainly, “The hand that delivered poison is also recorded in the history of the poison.” Nand Aruni asks Lau Kin-Hung, “How

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Chapter 33 — The Test of the Minds

many bones are there in your accounts?” The question breaks apart the arithmetic of profit. Broom attempts to say “dignity,” but “profit” comes out of his mouth. At the end Ananya announces that before their next breath each rogue must search for one name he erased and pronounce it fully. “The fourth breath ends; the next breath begins.”

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Chapter 34 — The Listening River

Part 1 · The Main Story

Different supernatural signs begin to appear in the homes and offices of the five rogues. The name “Sarayu Devi” floats in Batuknath’s bathwater. A child’s cry is heard from Chandrapal’s safe. Raghav loses his voice as Maithili letters begin growing across his screen. A narikel leaf appears spontaneously on Lau’s desk. Water rather than ink flows from Broom’s pen, forming the word “worker.” At the school a new lesson begins: “Do not speak an incomplete name.” The children receive pebbles bearing half a name and must discover the other half. At night the five rogues’ minds are seated around an earthen bowl. If a spoken name is true, a drop remains in the bowl; if false, it becomes smoke and flies away. Batuknath gives Sarayu

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Chapter 34 — The Listening River

Devi’s complete identity—a labourer, her basket, the record declaring her absent—and preserves the drop: “the first blow.” Chandrapal speaks Ujjwal’s name, but remembers only the sums of money, and his drop becomes smoke. Raghav says, “Munna Paswan, whose account I opened and thereby made him a criminal,” and preserves his drop. Lau fails with “the boy,” but tries to say “Ujjwal,” haltingly. Broom fails with “labour” and “worker” before finally saying “Sarayu Devi” and preserving a drop. At the end of the fifth breath Budhba’s ghost says, “One who has spoken a single name is not free. Now he must go to that name’s home.”

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Chapter 35 — The Threshold of a Name

Part 1 · The Main Story

The sixth breath begins: after saying a name, one must now go to the person’s home. Ananya draws five houses in the earth, including those of Sarayu Devi, Munna Paswan, and Ujjwal. Batuknath Hariharan’s ticket changes by itself to “Sarayu Devi’s threshold.” On the train he again meets Budhba’s ghost in disguise, who tells him, “Today you will read not a legal section, but a courtyard.” At Sarayu Devi’s broken house an elderly woman advises him to touch the dust to his eyes. As he does so, he sees Sarayu’s final day and sits down on the ground. Chandrapal Batra is shaken by a photograph of Ujjwal’s house—the sloping thatch roof and the teeth marks on a pillow—but does not visit it. He orders the pressure on Devika to stop. Raghav

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Chapter 35 — The Threshold of a Name

searches for Munna’s incomplete address, deliberately left obscure, and writes, “Paswan settlement, south of the river, by the old peepal.” A leaf becomes still. On Lau Kin-Hung’s map millions of thresholds begin to shine in place of markets. Edward Broom reads “Sarayu Devi” incorrectly on stage. That night the five minds are tested by stepping across thresholds made of earth. Batuknath and Raghav succeed. Chandrapal fails, for the threshold retreats. Lau cannot set foot on any threshold, and Broom stands speechless at Sarayu Devi’s.

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Chapter 36 — Home, Fear, Dream

In the seventh breath each rogue must learn three things about a victim: the home, the fear, and the dream. In Sarayu Devi’s home Batuknath sees hungry children and the word “waiting” growing in ashes. Chandrapal stands before Devika in Ujjwal’s house and tries to call himself “only an adviser,” but his fingers grow still when he sees Ujjwal’s unfinished letter: “Sister, I was wrong, but I was not a criminal.” Raghav meets Munna’s father and mother. The mother shows him a cotton towel and asks, “Is this what your job is like?” Lau Kin-Hung understands for the first time that “statistics” are actually people within homes. Edward Broom practises writing “Forgive me” in Maithili and finally writes an awkward sentence: “Sarayu Devi,

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Chapter 36 — Home, Fear, Dream

one of my crimes is that I did not know your name.” The dreams are then revealed: Sarayu Devi dreamed of her child’s education; Ujjwal dreamed that Devika would not have to live in fear; Munna dreamed that his father would not bow his head. In the night’s test, Batuknath can describe the home, partly the fear, but is silent about the dream. Chandrapal has seen the home but is silent about the dream. Raghav recounts all three and weeps. Lau cannot describe even one whole home. Broom manages one name in imperfect pronunciation. Instead of passing judgment, Budhba’s ghost assigns them “homework.”

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Chapter 37 — Three Pebbles

Throughout the day the three pebbles of the seventh breath—home, fear, and dream—rattle in the children’s pockets. Pebbles and leaves also appear mysteriously in the rogues’ rooms, revealing their childhoods and the beginnings of their crimes. Batuknath remembers his father’s brokerage in securing the release of seized property. Chandrapal recalls the first farmer he cheated, whose face resembles Ujjwal’s, and his honest friend Shamim. Raghav recalls his childhood name, “Raghavesh,” and his son’s question: “What is a mule?” Lau remembers his poor childhood home and his mother’s dream: “Did I bring you out of poverty so that you could turn the poor into statistics?” Broom remembers an incorrectly spelt sign naming an Indian river,

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Chapter 37 — Three Pebbles

kept in his company’s old warehouse. At the school the children write the names of all five rogues on the ground and learn the “beginnings of their crimes”: a small favour, the selling of time, the erasure of names, taking from the poor as revenge for poverty, and hiding culpability in numbers. Meera and Soumya explain that understanding suffering is not the same as forgiving a crime, but can be a means of cutting out its roots. At the end Chandrapal and Raghav speak to each other over the telephone for the first time without the language of lawyers: “I am remembering.” It is not complete remorse, only the beginning of memory.

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Chapter 38 — Pronouncing the Names

After the eighth breath the game stops for two days. Budhba’s ghost says that merely writing a name is not enough: time must be given to learning how to pronounce it. The five rogues find themselves mysteriously compelled to pronounce the victims’ names, sometimes wrongly and sometimes correctly. Batuknath hears “Bhola Nat,” not “Bholanath,” in the foam of his tea. On Chandrapal’s certificate appear the words, “This degree did not authorise you to sell names.” Raghav joins scraps of a bundle to complete “Munna Paswan,” and Munna’s figure appears before him, declaring, “Being a mule was not my livelihood; it was your network.” Lau Kin-Hung’s employees had shortened names to “B. Nat” and “U. Jha,” but that night the full names

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Chapter 38 — Pronouncing the Names

emerge as drops of water. Edward Broom reads a name wrongly at a public gathering and is humiliated. In Garh Narikel the “rule of three leaves” is established: for every name, read the home, the death, and the humiliation. Hulasi, an otherworldly figure, tells her own story for the first time: she died in an accident in a well, but the villagers insulted her by calling it “suicide.” Budhba’s ghost declares that every rogue must henceforth read one name correctly each night, or his own signature will begin to fade. This really begins happening by the end of the chapter: “Hari” vanishes from Batuknath’s signature, and the “tra” in Batra grows faint.

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Chapter 39 — The Quiet of Seeds

Part 1 · The Main Story

After the ninth breath a deep, expectant stillness descends upon Garh Narikel. Names have been read, but the houses are still only half open. A home is made from memory, food, work, and song. In the cracked screen of Ujjwal's phone, Devika sees not her own face but that of the whole village, and writes a new lesson: "Fear kept secret becomes a business." The real task of the tenth breath is "sending water into burrows": taking knowledge to every village, school, and family. Soumya translates official language into popular speech: "financial irregularity" becomes "a child's fear was bought." Having heard Munna's story from the children, a bank clerk identifies three mule accounts in his register: "the first victory of the tenth

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Chapter 39 — The Quiet of Seeds

breath, without fanfare.” Batuknath stays at an inn outside the village, but when he tries to enter by uttering a name, Budhba’s ghost asks, “How many names are confined within this name?” The question brings back the memory of his father writing down the names of poor people. Raghav opens an airline ticket in order to flee, but his hand stops at the space for a name: “Which is the real name?” At night a symbolic meal is held, with offerings of rice, salt, and water placed beside every dead person’s name. At the end a word appears in a drop of dew: “Now.”

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Chapter 40 — Letters in the Dew

Part 1 · The Main Story

The eleventh breath opens with the word “Now” written on the morning dew. It becomes clear that reading names is not enough: life itself, including hunger, possessions, and daily detail, must be read. The children begin bringing an object with each name—Bhola Nat’s lunchbox, the shattered glass of Ujjwal’s telephone, Meera’s note saying “My love is not a crime,” and Nand’s smoke-stained blueprint. Batuknath carries his father’s old slips bearing names in his pocket as he returns to Channa Grove. The title of Chandrapal’s press statement changes by itself to “Read Me Too.” Raghav rejoins fragments of SIM cards and recovers Munna Paswan’s name and face. A bank clerk writes “Look at the people” and marks fourteen mule accounts.

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Chapter 40 — Letters in the Dew

Grains of salt fall onto Lau Kin-Hung’s table—the language of food, not a bargain. During Edward Broom’s speech a picture of a lunchbox appears on the screen. In the circle devoted to privacy Meera states clearly: “What I share willingly is memory; what is taken from me through fear is violence.” Kamli, the daughter of Sarayu Mahato, attends the meeting for the first time and sets down her mother’s broken anklet: “Father said he was going to have it repaired, and never returned.” Mahadev Sah, a spy sent by Chandrapal, cannot write his full name, and Budhba’s ghost says, “One who cannot write his own complete name has come to erase another’s.” At the close the children begin tracing the “journey” of every object—from factory to

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Chapter 40 — Letters in the Dew

bridge, or from shop into a fraudster’s hands. “Whoever reads a life cannot escape the path it took.” In the midst of his speech, Broom tastes salt in water and trembles.

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Chapter 41 — The Boat of Names

Part 1 · The Main Story

The twelfth breath begins. Moving beyond names and objects, the children now trace a "path"—a life journey—for each dead person, drawing it on the earth with rice, turmeric, salt and water. They make Bhola Nat's route from home to the contractor's camp; Sarayu Mahto's from a lunchbox to a bridge pier—"not a fall from the pier, but from the count"; and Ujjwal's from home to school, the mobile-phone shop, debt, fear of digital arrest and the rooftop. Nishant Jha shows Munna Paswan three bowls—name, account and fear—and questions him. Munna replies, "The fear was not mine; it was given to me." On Chandrapal's computer a folder called "Path" opens of its own accord, containing an image of the bowls drawn in the soil. Raghav finds

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Chapter 41 — The Boat of Names

leaves rather than dust coming out of his smashed phone, and sends Lau Kin-Hung the message, “The path is coming back.” Lau answers, “Cut it off.” Grains of salt arrange themselves in a line across Lau’s table, extending through India, Bihar and Garh Narikel. In the middle of Edward Broom’s speech the microphone carries the clinking of a spoon against a lunchbox. An elderly woman of Garh Narikel, whose son died at the bridge, appears for the first time and can say only “A Monday in Bhadra,” the day her son left home. Budhba’s ghost tells her, “Whatever fragment you find, fill that fragment with truth.” At the end of the chapter a “turning” is identified along every path—the point where the crime could have been stopped—and the

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Chapter 41 — The Boat of Names

dew carries the words, “Take up the burden.”

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Chapter 42 — The Circles of Burden

Part 1 · The Main Story

During the thirteenth breath, the children draw two circles: “those against whom a crime was committed” and “those who committed it.” Ananya adds a third, the heaviest circle: “those who saw and remained silent.” Munna Paswan must lift Bhola Nat’s heavy lunchbox. Devika tells him, “This is not your crime, but it is society’s burden,” and from that day a rule for the village meal register is established. Batuknath Hariharan’s file containing his victorious court order becomes physically heavy; he realises that it is filled not with paper but with time. On Chandrapal’s screen, mule accounts turn into bricks and fall upon his desk. Raghav finds stones and leaves beneath his pillow, inscribed “The call was not disconnected,” “Fear

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Chapter 42 — The Circles of Burden

was sold," and other phrases; Hulasi stops him from throwing them away. Salt water, rather than ink, flows from Lau Kin-Hung's pen: "Not a transfer of burden, but an acceptance of burden." Edward Broom's report will not dry. In Garh Narikel the second stage of the lesson transforms every object into work: the lunchbox becomes a food register, the helmet a pledge of safety. Gop Kumar, Ramaiyya, Soumya, Meera and Devika each acknowledge their own "share"—their failures of care. In the closing scene Batuknath raises one corner of the file and says, "This cannot be lifted alone." Budhba's ghost replies, "To lift it alone is punishment. To share the lifting is justice."

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Chapter 43 — The Burden in Motion

After the thirteenth breath, the burden that has been shared does not disappear. Instead, it begins travelling from village to village, and whoever receives it cannot evade responsibility. Mist on the glass covering Batuknath Hariharan’s degree brings out the names of the dead—Bhola Nat, Sarayu, Munna and Ujjwal. Suddenly his aged mother addresses him by his childhood name: “Batuk, how many names have you eaten?” He discovers that the door into his inner world can also be his mother’s tongue. Chandrapal Batra’s son dreams of a girl asking her name and saying, “Your father’s earnings smell of my hanging.” Raghav Signal’s wife sees the grains of rice on her plate arrange themselves into the words “Account closed.” Lau Kin-Hung

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Chapter 43 — The Burden in Motion

orders his secretary to locate a place called Garh Narikel. On the map a point glimmers within the sea like a burning coconut leaf, and his right hand, the one with which he signs, trembles. In Garh Narikel, Devika, Nishant, Meera, Soumya and Ira continue their respective work: the school, accounting, the pledge of privacy, document translation and the reading of names. The ghosts begin appearing even in daylight, and the loth spirits start picking up leaves. Ba announces, “Fear has now gone to their homes,” but warns against proclaiming “victory”: “People who are working do not announce victory.”

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Chapter 44 — The Granddaughter’s Notebook

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

After the fourteenth breath, fear moves beyond the rogues’ bodies and enters their children’s and grandchildren’s notebooks and questions. Batuknath Hariharan’s seven-year-old granddaughter draws Channa Grove in her notebook and asks, “Grandfather, why are you standing outside it? If you have won, why are you outside the game?” The question leaves Batuknath motionless. Young men who survived fraud arrive politely at Chandrapal Batra’s house to ask permission to pass. Chandrapal’s son lets them through and tells his father plainly, “I am wondering how many switched-off mobile phones are hidden inside my education, car and home.” Raghav Signal’s teenage daughter asks, “Why do you all speak in secret? For whose safety?” Raghav has

Chapter 44 — The Granddaughter’s Notebook

no answer. Lau Kin-Hung’s son, studying abroad, asks, “What if one day people demand an accounting by their names instead of by their countries?” In Garh Narikel, Budhba’s ghost tells the children, “When a child asks questions in a rogue’s house, know that the leaf has reached his door.” A new entry appears in Gop Kumar’s file entitled “Door”: “Their own children become the first messengers.” In the final scene Ananya writes just one word in the earth at the centre of the field—“Whose?”—and it echoes within all four rogues as a single question.

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Chapter 45 — The Air Within

Part 1 · The Main Story

After the question “Whose?” in the fifteenth breath, the sixteenth releases the old, imprisoned air inside the rogues’ houses: the smell of bribes and the locks of fear. Three new figures appear among the ghosts in the granddaughter’s picture of Batuknath Hariharan: an old man who eats papers, a person who chews mobile phones, and a merchant without a mouth. She asks him directly, “Why are you standing outside the game?” Chandrapal Batra’s son turns his father’s car back, asking, “Why is my name put where their names should be?” In the silence, his mother feels relief. Raghav Signal’s teenage daughter starts a notebook called “Record of Silences,” in which she will write down the questions her father refuses to answer. Lau

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Chapter 45 — The Air Within

Kin-Hung’s son reads an essay at school entitled “The Lineage of Profit and the Debt of Names” and declares, “I do not want to inherit this lineage.” The auditorium falls silent; nobody applauds. Edward Broom’s granddaughter asks where the names of dead people are kept: “Complexity does not grant permission to erase a name.” In Garh Narikel Budhba’s ghost explains, “A group of children is a group of questions. It is born not against any person, but against lies.” The chapter closes with the children declaring together, “We will take up the names that were erased. We will renounce the profit made by erasing names.”

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Chapter 46 — The Darkness of Inheritance

Part 1 · The Main Story

In the seventeenth breath wealth searches for heirs, but the heirs themselves begin looking into the darkness behind the wealth. Batuknath's granddaughter draws three circles on a blank sheet—home, account and name—and asks, "Why does a house have feet? If a house is built on someone's dead feet, perhaps it walks at night." In Hariharan's will, the words "movable property" change into "moving dead." Chandrapal's son confronts his father with a list including Munna Paswan, Ujjwal Jha and Sarayu, and asks, "Were all these people my partners?" When nobody can explain the origin of benefits registered in his name, he demands that they be removed. Raghav Signal's wife sets aside a grain of rice every day at mealtime, "for the person

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Chapter 46 — The Darkness of Inheritance

whose household rice was taken away.” Lau Kin-Hung’s granddaughter draws a blue tree upon the glass; voices emerging from the mobile-phone fruits on its branches ask, “Under what law is my death recorded?” In Garh Narikel the children devise a new game: before taking up any object they must ask, “Whose labour, whose loss, whose name?” Budhba’s ghost becomes fully visible in daylight and lays down a new rule: “Do not weep for wealth amassed by erasing names, even if you must live without it. Sometimes deprivation, too, is liberation.” At the end Ananya strikes out the word “refusal” and writes “choice”: “They are choosing which story to carry with them.” With a breath from Budhba’s ghost, the blank paper sinks into the soil and

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Chapter 46 — The Darkness of Inheritance

sprouts as a coconut seedling.

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Chapter 47 — The Tale of the Elephant and the Crocodile

Part 1 · The Main Story

During the eighteenth breath Ba recounts the myth of the elephant and the crocodile: the crocodile seizes the elephant, the elephant’s strength diminishes, and at last it calls out for help. Channa Grove turns the story into a practical game, in which the rogues’ descendants—Hariharan’s granddaughter, Batra’s son Aryan, Raghav’s nephew, and a girl named Mei-Lata being raised in Lau Kin-Hung’s family—play the roles of crocodile and elephant. The rule is that the elephant can escape the crocodile’s grip on the water only by speaking the correct names of the dead. Ananya calls “Sarayu,” “Ujjwal” and “Nand Aruni,” and escapes Hariharan’s granddaughter’s grasp. The girl repeats, “A house whose feet are built upon dead feet walks at

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Chapter 47 — The Tale of the Elephant and the Crocodile

night," and releases Batra's son. Aryan first tries the words "percentage," "signal" and "commission," without success; finally he speaks his own name and "Ujjwal Jha," and is freed. "It was as though he had stepped outside his father's house for the first time." In a parallel scene in Delhi, Satyavrat Mehta reads an old manuscript of the elephant-and-crocodile tale and realises that nobody in this novel has been able to call out like the elephant—the system had closed its ears. He writes a statement of admission in his office, but does not sign it; he folds it into his pocket. Budhba's ghost and Panidubbi debate whether salvation comes from the elephant naming and calling out, or from the crocodile recognising the history of its

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Chapter 47 — The Tale of the Elephant and the Crocodile

own grip: “To turn hunger into a religion is a crime.” Ba’s prediction closes the chapter: “In the end Satyavrat Mehta will not come carrying a sword. He will come carrying his ears.”

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Chapter 48 — The Call

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 3

In the nineteenth breath the people of Channa Grove practise “calling” instead of kabaddi. Ananya places an empty bowl before them and says, “An empty bowl is a home for the voice.” The calls of Sarayu, Ujjwal and Munna Paswan are heard. On the switched-off phone of Devika’s brother Ujjwal a line appears of its own accord in Devika’s hand: “I am not the money lost; I am the morning of our home.” Munna himself comes to admit his mistake: “I did not understand whose body my thumbprint would lift.” From that day he becomes the school’s first volunteer. Meanwhile in Delhi a brass bell rings by itself upon Satyavrat Mehta’s desk. In a dream that night a little girl tells him, “The ears with which one hears a name are inside.” At four

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Chapter 48 — The Call

in the morning he sets off for Garh Narikel without car or security detail, on foot and then in an ordinary railway compartment. Arriving at Channa Grove in the evening, he announces, “I have come very late … Today I shall listen.” At these words water rises of its own accord in the empty bowl. He sits down to write Sarayu’s full name, but a leaf tells him, “The name will be complete only when you also write the household’s name, labour, waiting and the lies about compensation.” All night Satyavrat, then Ananya, Devika, Munna, Hariharan’s granddaughter and Batra’s son write the names in turn. Finally Satyavrat acknowledges his own silence: “Whenever my silence supported a lie, enter the names of those silences in this record

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Chapter 48 — The Call

too.” The children write in the earth: “Silence: Satyavrat Mehta.” In the closing scene he sits outside the circle and merely listens. “The punishment of listening felt like a blessing that night.”

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Chapter 49 — The Record of Silences

In the twentieth breath Budhba’s ghost makes it clear that recording only the names of the dead leaves the call incomplete: the names of “those who saw and remained silent” must also be written. Satyavrat Mehta begins a “record of silences.” Beside Sarayu’s name he enters, “The silence of the official who did not think it necessary to ask her name.” Devika writes her own entry: “A sister’s silence.” Munna Paswan realises that the bank clerk had noticed something suspicious yet remained silent. Meanwhile words appear on Batuknath Hariharan’s papers: “Why were you silent when you knew?” A phone-repair shopkeeper handling Chandrapal Batra’s screen becomes frightened: “Sir, this is not a mobile phone. It is testimony.” Beneath Raghav

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Chapter 49 — The Record of Silences

Signal’s pillow, old deleted orders fall like leaves. In Garh Narikel the bank clerk, a hospital compounder and a lawyer’s clerk record their respective silences: “The silence of leaving the other-remarks field blank,” “I saved my face by saying ‘from above,’” and “The silence at the doorway.” Ira turns over the pages recording applause at a foreign conference and writes “The silence of the foreign auditorium.” In the evening the empty bowl rings by itself: “The silences have been written. Now read the names that have been entered.” Hariharan and Chandrapal’s son Aryan read Sarayu’s and Ujjwal’s names publicly, their voices trembling. In the city Chandrapal sits down clutching his chest. Budhba’s ghost speaks the final line: “The

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Chapter 49 — The Record of Silences

silence of one who hears and begins to work will slowly fall away like leaves. The silence of one who hears and remains silent again will become a crocodile and seize his feet.”

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Chapter 50 — Names After the Body

Satyavrat Mehta remains standing outside the grove, for its first rule of entry is to listen to the voice of one's own body. Suddenly a pond forms in the middle of Channa Grove, where broken letters come together to form names: Sarayu Devi, Budhan Miyan, Jagesar Paswan and Ujjwal Jha. Ananya tells Satyavrat that the name of one who has repeatedly remained silent is also recorded. He speaks his own name into the water: "Satyavrat Mehta. Silence." From the western side of the grove a vast elephant-like shadow appears. Its feet are bound by inner crocodiles of greed, fear, office and prestige. As the names are pronounced one by one—Sarayu, Budhan, Ujjwal, Nand Aruni and others—the elephant's shackles break. At last it looks skyward

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Chapter 50 — Names After the Body

and utters “Acceptance”: liberation and death arrive within the same body. Batuknath Hariharan’s shadow appears at the grove’s edge and shouts, “Where is your jurisdiction?” Budhba’s ghost replies, “Wherever names are erased, the jurisdiction of Channa Grove begins.” Ananya writes beside Satyavrat’s name, “The one who listened late, but did listen.” Gop Kumar announces that from now on the leaves will write for themselves, not he. That night the workers’ families have comforting dreams, in which the dead bathe without the baskets they once carried; the rogues have terrible dreams of commands turning into crocodiles’ jaws that seize their wrists, and passwords changing into dead people’s names. In the morning Satyavrat tells his

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Chapter 50 — Names After the Body

driver, “Delhi later. First the Ganga bridge … We still have to place names where the bodies fell.”

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Chapter 51 — The Weight of Witnessing

Satyavrat Mehta enters Channa Grove. The earth is hard outside and soft within. For the first time real crocodiles—the water creatures that chew flesh—appear in person. Through Panidubbi the oldest crocodile says, “We eat bodies; that is also our nature. But whose duty was it to release the bodies left bound in the water?” Budhba’s ghost explains that the title A Water Burial Among the Crocodiles signifies not fear alone, but both the defeat of the body and the liberation of the name; this does not, however, pardon the crime. Satyavrat spreads his official papers on the soil, and the letters change in the air: “disposed of” becomes “trace,” and “unavailable” becomes “unnamed.” He understands that the language of law can write a

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Chapter 51 — The Weight of Witnessing

second death for the dead. When Ananya asks, “What does a witness do?” he answers, “A witness does not sell his eyes.” He places the nameplate of his office upon the earth and writes his first witness statement: “For a very long time I kept listening to procedure.” This confession brings not applause but quiet. Meera, Devika and Soumya ask their own questions: Can privacy be restored? How might a brother have been saved? Brahma of the peepal tree answers, “Love for the dead becomes the watch over the future.” At the chapter’s end the crocodiles return to the water, and a coconut shoot rises where Satyavrat’s official nameplate was laid.

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Chapter 52 — The Next Voice

Part 1 · The Main Story

In this pivotal chapter Channa Grove itself is cut down, identified as an “encroachment” on the government map and a “development zone” in the contractor’s papers. As the trees fall, memories hidden in the darkness emerge into the light—a scrap of a woman’s scarf, an earthen lamp, a stone bearing a name, a child’s glass marble—and more people begin to gather. A tea seller sets up his cart, women place lamps, and some of the labourers doing the cutting quietly pour water over the roots at night. Satyavrat Mehta returns in a plain white kurta and sits beside the severed roots. A little girl asks, “If the grove is being cut, will the story be cut as well?” He replies, “A tree can be cut; its roots continue listening. A story lives

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Chapter 52 — The Next Voice

wherever listeners survive.” When the final great branch falls, the roots give off not the smell of rot but the gentle scent of wet soil and children’s hair. The girl asks, “Shall we grow a grove here again?” The children answer, “A new grove, but the old names … In the new grove’s shade there will be no court of lies, but an assembly for listening.” Satyavrat gives them an old register. In it the girl writes, “From today, the watch belongs to us.” At dawn a tiny green point sprouts on the cut stump: “The grove is listening.” Asked by the girl, “Will you come back?” Satyavrat answers, “Wherever names are called, I will remain in debt to those who listen.” The chapter makes clear that a people’s meeting-place will now take the

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Chapter 52 — The Next Voice

grove’s place. The story has not ended; after one long breath, it has only begun again.

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Chapter 53 — Morning After the Felling

Part 1 · The Main Story

For the first time after Channa Grove is felled, sunlight falls directly into the space it occupied. Instead of happiness, the people feel an unfamiliar shame, as if an aged body long kept covered had suddenly been exposed. Budhba's ghost counts the tree's age in the rings on the cut stump and says, "When a tree is cut, it opens its age. When a human being is cut down, their name must be opened." The children change the rules: kabaddi will also be played by day, and stones with names will be set along the boundary; if a player strikes one, the game must stop. For the first time Devika writes her brother's complete name, Ujjwal Kumar Jha, without weeping. Meera sets down a stone marked "Privacy" and says, "The right to silence is

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Chapter 53 — Morning After the Felling

equally necessary.” Ira arrives by the night bus and sits among the children. Satyavrat Mehta does not come that day; the children record, “The listener is absent, but the debt is present.” In the evening two unknown men, possibly commercial or land-mafia agents, wander outside the village and are overheard saying on a mobile phone, “The project is feasible.” Only Panidubbi notices the danger. At the close a yellow municipal notice bearing an official seal is pasted to the stump: “The first test of the watch over names was about to begin.”

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Chapter 54 — Around the Stump

For the first time the villagers sit in a circle around the stump. Although its branches are gone, they bow their heads—not now from fear, but from shame. In the clefts of the roots lie old objects: a strand of red cloth, a glass marble, a half-written name. Ananya stops anyone from picking them up, saying, “First we will listen.” Ba touches the roots and says, “So many heads have been cut off in our village, but the lineage could not be cut. If the roots live, shade is born again.” An elderly labourer’s son reads his father’s name for the first time. A rule is established that after each name a sign of nature—a breeze, a bird, a ray of sunlight—should be entered, which the children regard as “the grove’s answer.” Meera brings a

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Chapter 54 — Around the Stump

red thread and establishes a rule: grief must not be turned into a spectacle alongside a name. The first stone is placed for “those whose names have not been found,” and Ba breaks down in tears over it. Gop Kumar realises that exposing the truth is not enough; truth needs a place where people can sit. In the evening the first outsider, a postmaster on a bicycle, brings a thick yellow envelope from the municipality. But Ananya says, “The reading of names is under way; the yellow paper can wait. Tomorrow we shall ask the names, lineage, greed and purpose of the words written upon it.” The envelope spends the night shifting uneasily on the edge of the stump.

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Chapter 55 — The Municipality’s Yellow Notice

Part 1 · The Main Story

The municipality’s yellow envelope is opened in the morning. In the name of “public beautification and road safety,” it orders the removal of the stones, lamps and signs; on the accompanying map, an empty square appears where Channa Grove stood. Ba, Devika, Meera and Gop Kumar take turns exposing the hollowness of official expressions such as “the general public,” “unverified stories” and “superstition.” At that moment Batuknath Hariharan’s messenger arrives with a glossy proposal for a “Channa Grove People’s Memory Centre,” complete with gate, plaques and ticket office. But Ananya asks, “Where is the stone for those whose names have not been found?” The messenger grows uncomfortable, and the little girl says plainly, “Then this

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Chapter 55 — The Municipality’s Yellow Notice

is not a centre; it is a cage.” For the first time Satyavrat Mehta intervenes publicly: “Before turning memory into a trust, it is necessary to obtain memory’s consent.” The crowd calls out “Present!” and the messenger departs with a seven-day warning. People write their replies along the margins of the yellow paper—“Not an empty plot, but a place of names”; “Not a crowd, but families”—and add their thumb impressions. The chapter ends with the villagers deciding to draw their own map instead of accepting the government’s. Its first point will be the cut stump.

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Chapter 56 — The First Map of Memory

Part 1 · The Main Story

The villagers turn over discarded sheets from an old bridge project and use the backs to draw a new map by hand. The Kamla-Balan river is drawn not as a straight line but as a winding channel: “This is not a river of files but a river of bodies.” Ba draws her mother’s old footpath, “Mother’s Way.” Ujjwal’s mother marks a black circle where her son’s phone was last active. Meera stops this becoming a spectacle and suggests putting a white point inside it, “the light remaining in the mind.” Soumya consults the women labourers and marks their settlement with the impressions of palms. Gop Kumar draws a hole in ash at the place of the missing receipt: “the mouth of the lost paper.” Two municipal employees come carrying measuring

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Chapter 56 — The First Map of Memory

tapes, but become uneasy when Ananya asks, “Whom will your survey peg pierce—whose name?” Budhba’s ghost appears almost bodily in daylight and comes to “sign” the new map. Meera adds a “circle of privacy,” the “right of what remains unspoken”; Ira proposes including the sky, and a boy marks a region called “Unnamed Planet,” the first indication of the story’s future direction. In the evening a messenger arrives with a courteous proposal for Batuknath Hariharan’s “People’s Memory Trust.” Ananya replies clearly, “Tomorrow we shall ask this proposal for its name.”

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Chapter 57 — Gangesha's Question

Batuknath Hariharan comes in person to Channa Grove, carrying a red file containing a formal proposal for the "Garh Narikel People's Memory Trust." Ananya stops him with the question, "Do you know justice?" At this turn Ira presents the story of Gangesha Upadhyaya, regarded as the founder of Navya-Nyaya and author of the Tattvachintamani. According to a folk account, Gangesha was born five years after his father's death, raising questions about the evidence of his birth; he also married a woman from the leatherworking community, raising questions of caste. Yet scholarly tradition, including figures named Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha 'Ashok,' obscured these truths about his life. Meera calls this "the murder of memory": "When

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Chapter 57 — Gangesha’s Question

honour strangles truth, it is not honour.” Batuknath tries to avoid accusations against the scholars by demanding “proof,” but Ananya asks, “What proof is there of caste? What proof is there for denying someone’s humanity?” A mysterious voice rises from the stump: “What evidence do you have for rejecting someone you call unacceptable?” In the cut rings of the stump the children imagine the Tattvachintamani and twelve thousand texts. Batuknath promises that “there will be no caste discrimination,” but Meera and Devika explain that merely entering names cannot break caste, and insist that “an institution should serve, not own.” Aruni strikes out “jurisdiction of the trust” from the rules and substitutes “duty of service.”

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Chapter 57 — Gangesha’s Question

Batuknath’s face tightens: he has lived by authority and fears responsibility. In the evening Satyavrat Mehta observes, “The word ‘trust’ looks smaller than justice; without justice it turns into a crocodile.” Batuknath’s proposal is not rejected, only held over for a hearing. Just then a new “Garh Narikel Digital Tribute Platform” lights up on the young people’s phones, signalling that, after the paper trust, a trust of screens—and a new form of digital exploitation—is approaching.

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Chapter 58 — Chandrapal’s Memorial App

Working behind the scenes, Chandrapal Batra operates a “digital tribute platform.” Advertisements flash on the village’s mobile phones: “Make a name immortal; keep memory safe.” When Devika opens the app, she finds that before entering a dead person’s name it demands the full address, bank details, photograph, compensation information and more, followed by consent for “use in memory publication, research, donations and partnerships.” “Not a tribute, but a trap.” Ira tests the app against Gangesha’s four means of knowledge—perception, inference, testimony and comparison. Ananya concludes, “The crocodile lies still on the surface of the water, keeping its teeth below.” Reading the consent terms, Meera explains that tears will

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Chapter 58 — Chandrapal’s Memorial App

become advertising and names a collection plate for donations. Gop Kumar’s technical examination shows that the platform repeats the structure of Chandrapal’s old network through three layers: cultural platform, service group and memory technology. Satyavrat Mehta asks, “If information is taken from a grieving family in exchange for remembering, is that tribute or a bargain?” Mysteriously, Chandrapal’s own screen flashes, “Tattvachintamani mode activated.” The stump’s laughter has travelled across the network. In Garh Narikel a “school of names” begins, teaching that speaking a name and handing over a name are different acts. Meera writes a new pledge: “I will speak the dead person’s name, but I will not hand over the key to the

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Chapter 58 — Chandrapal’s Memorial App

home.” An elderly mother writes her drowned son’s name upon a stone beside the stump instead of uploading it to the app: “My son went into the water, and I brought him out of the water. Why should I drown him in a screen again?” In the closing scene an anonymous message reaches Gop Kumar’s phone: “The donation code changes tonight. Raghav is watching.” This makes Raghav Signal’s involvement in the network clear and locates the next danger there.

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Chapter 59 — Raghav Signal’s New Code

Raghav Somani’s deleted message leaves a faint “leaf mark” on the glass of Gop’s phone: erased words leave behind their “vapour.” The children apply the categories associated with Gangesha—perception, inference, testimony, comparison, postulation and non-apprehension—to the code. Gop Kumar explains that Raghav has always given sweet names to things: money becomes a donation, commission becomes service, threats become advice, and deletion becomes privacy. Meera makes the distinction explicit: “Privacy is not a shield for crime; it is the victim’s right.” A young man called Bhavesh, who had done minor work for Chandrapal’s app, comes forward and admits that Raghav directed the routes taken by donations through signs resembling a

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Chapter 59 — Raghav Signal’s New Code

room, the veins of a leaf and an inverted lamp. A child holds his breath, touches the line of the kabaddi field and demonstrates “the answer to a name: play.” A code can be closed; kabaddi is an open breath. Batuknath murmurs, “This is a game, not a court.” Ba answers, “If a court chews up years and a game saves a name, then the game is justice.” In the evening Raghav’s warning appears in a blue line on the earth: “Remove the source,” pointing towards Satyavrat. Ananya writes “Source of silence: collective ears,” destroying the message. They decide that on the following day Satyavrat himself will sit for a “lesson in silence.”

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Chapter 60 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Second Silence

Part 1 · The Main Story

The people are furious at Raghav’s new code, whose religious vocabulary—offering, reverence, fund—reveals, when held in the sun, the words “share,” “route” and “commission” beneath it. Yet Satyavrat Mehta does not answer immediately. He understands that “eagerness can also be a form of arrogance.” Asked by Ananya, “Why are you silent?” he distinguishes his first silence, which was a crime, from his second, a vow to listen. At the assembly he sits outside the circle, not at its centre: “Whoever sits in the middle today must be a name, not a public person.” Devika, Meera and Soumya expose, in turn, the hypocrisy of the memorial app, remembrance without permission, and the terminology of documents—vacant, heritage, digital,

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Chapter 60 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Second Silence

donation. Ba connects this to the erasure of inconvenient truths about Gangesha’s life: “If the names of Channa Grove are turned into idols, that too will be murder.” Instead of pronouncing a verdict, Satyavrat sets a condition: everyone proposing a memorial, donation or trust must first attend the reading of names. The children are the first to sign a sheet entitled “The Proposer’s Oath Before the Names”; Ananya stops Satyavrat from signing first. At the end he writes only, “Heard.” An agent for Chandrapal’s app offers to broadcast the event by phone, but Devika refuses. The chapter ends with an announcement of the first “Festival of Names” the following day, without music, stage or garlands. From the stump the breeze carries

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Chapter 60 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Second Silence

the sound “Kabaddi.” The next game will be played not by holding one’s breath, but by saving it.

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Chapter 61 — The First Festival of Names

Part 1 · The Main Story

The “Festival of Names” begins without drums or banners. Ananya explains, “A name heard again is not merely lamentation; it is presence.” The first stone, inscribed “those whose names have not been found,” is read, and the children respond, “Present.” At the second, an incomplete name —“Sar ...”—Meera warns, “If we invent a completion for an unfinished name, we erase its real incompleteness.” Ba establishes a rule: “Gangesha asked about the essence; society asked about lineage. Therefore, in the reading of names, essence comes first and lineage afterwards.” Devika trembles when reading Ujjwal’s name and adds, “His silence is present as well.” Meera reads her own name and says, “My privacy is present.” Gop Kumar learns the pace

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Chapter 61 — The First Festival of Names

required to “read human beings,” instead of merely reading a list. The form of kabaddi changes: when a player’s breath breaks, that is not defeat; the player simply takes up the watch over the next name. Aruni postpones Batuknath’s trust proposal with the words, “Today belongs to the dead; the trust will be heard tomorrow.” That evening an aged labourer’s widow faints while reading a name, and Satyavrat Mehta runs to support her. The people understand that silence need not mean inaction. In the night a green glimmer, suggesting a sprout, appears in a cleft of the roots.

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Chapter 62 — The Green Point on the Stump

In the morning Ananya sees a tiny green point, a shoot, on the stump. Ba describes it as “a sprout that comes when sap remains in a cut body,” and the children enter “green point after the name” in their register. In Chandrapal Batra’s app, a photograph of the shoot appears under the caption “Sacred Moment of Rebirth,” with a donation button beside it. Devika and Meera establish a rule governing the dignity of looking: before taking a picture, state the reason. At night Budhba’s ghost appears completely distinct for the first time and declares a new form of kabaddi: “From now on, kabaddi is the game of saving the sprout.” Satyavrat Mehta writes inwardly, “First rule of justice: if someone’s breath breaks, do not punish them; give

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Chapter 62 — The Green Point on the Stump

them water.” The question of Gangesha returns. Ba makes clear that society “reads the scripture, not the body,” and so suppressed inconvenient truths about the writer’s life. The children apply four categories of evidence—perception, inference, testimony and memory—to their game. A government vehicle arrives from the district with an officer and consultant to present plans for “heritage enhancement” and a “ticketing system.” When Ananya asks, “Have you heard the reading of names?” the consultant replies, “Inspection first, participation later,” words the children find as threatening as the yellow notice. At the end a glossy new document headed “Garh Narikel Heritage Corridor: Preliminary Concept” catches beside the stump,

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Chapter 62 — The Green Point on the Stump

signalling a new threat of commercialisation.

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Chapter 63 — The Garh Narikel Heritage Project

Part 1 · The Main Story

On the third day after the sprout emerges, government vehicles arrive without embarrassment and announce the “Garh Narikel Heritage Project.” A consultant wearing dark glasses displays plans for a “Channa Memorial Gateway,” a “Ghost Kabaddi Theatre,” a “Water Burial Visual Gallery” and a “Digital Wall of Names,” counting the inscribed stones as numbers rather than names. He laughs away Ananya’s question, “Have you read the names?” Batuknath Hariharan’s draft for a “People’s Memory Trust” has already found its way into the government file. Devika and Meera oppose the proposed sound-and-light show and the display of images without permission: “The right to grief belongs to those who have borne it, not to a consultant.” Ba points to

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Chapter 63 — The Garh Narikel Heritage Project

the colourful map and asks, “Where on this map is the place where Sarayu’s name was first read?” The sprout, the green point, now takes the shape of two leaves. The consultant immediately wants to photograph it as the “project emblem,” but Ananya stops him: “This is not an emblem; it is a child. Ask the mother’s permission before photographing it.” Satyavrat Mehta asks Aruni, “What are you trying to save?” Aruni answers, “We want to save the grove, but even if we cannot save it, we must save names from the hands that would sell them.” At midnight a municipal employee silently pastes a fresh white notice reading “Invitation to Tender.” “Today memory itself has been put out to tender.”

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Chapter 64 — A Tender for Memory

The smooth official language of the tender turns grief into an “emotional heritage resource,” water burial into a “water-based interpretative corridor,” and ghost kabaddi into a “folk-belief-based performance sports zone.” Meera reads the pledge of privacy again: “By whose authority will a whisper be recorded?” The children apply Gangesha’s question of “evidence” to every line of the tender: “Profit is not evidence.” Ujjwal’s mother is shaken when she sees that her son’s final telephone ring has been included under “sound design.” Soumya examines the cost sheet and finds zero allocation for labourers’ rehabilitation and privacy protection, while “brand identity” has the largest allocation: “This is not memory; it is a map of the

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Chapter 64 — A Tender for Memory

marketplace.” Gop Kumar counts fifty-four appearances of the word “memory” and only two of “name.” Batuknath Hariharan arrives with the legal draft of his “People’s Memory Trust” and declares, “Law stands above emotion.” Ba replies, “Law does not stand above emotion; it stands below justice. When law abandons justice, that is when it becomes a crocodile.” In the evening the children modify kabaddi into a game of “Evidence! Evidence!” Whoever is caught must explain the grounds for a line from the tender. At night a faint signature on an inner sheet of the notice is found beneath the phrase “Draft prepared by an international cultural revival consultant.” Gop and Aruni compare it with Edward Broom’s old mark: a similar sign

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Chapter 64 — A Tender for Memory

appeared in the foreign consultant’s file for the bridge. At the chapter’s close Ananya writes, “The bidder is still hiding his name.”

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Chapter 65 — Broom’s Return

Part 1 · The Main Story

Behind the tender for memory stands a company called “Nav-Arogya Aadhar Pvt. Ltd.” Gop Kumar recognises its foreign partner: “The name is new; the owner is old”—Edward Broom. Broom’s letter calls water burial a “Water Memory Section,” crocodiles “Aquatic Life Symbols,” and the dead workers a “Labour Story Gallery.” The accompanying colour illustration replaces Channa Grove with a glass dome, an artificial pond and mock crocodiles with red eyes; ghost kabaddi has become a “Night Light Performance.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “No memory can be made public without permission.” Meera and Devika demand transparency in the donation accounts. Gop Kumar reveals that one branch of the company is linked to the trade in medicines during the

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Chapter 65 — Broom’s Return

epidemic, another to an old safety consultant for the bridge contract, and a third to the digital memorial app. An elderly woman descended from Sarayu speaks movingly: “If these people put her name inside a glass house and sell tickets, that will be a second death.” A boy carefully waters the green point every day. When Batuknath calls this “against the rules,” the boy replies, “You make it official; I will keep it alive.” That night Gop’s device receives word that a Harvard research team led by Professor Elina Graves is coming. “Broom’s return was not alone; a glittering procession of knowledge was also approaching.”

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Chapter 66 — The Harvard Research Team

Part 1 · The Main Story

A Harvard research team arrives in Garh Narikel: a young researcher, three women scholars, a translator, a filmmaker and a grant coordinator. Ira seats them with the instruction “First listen,” and Ananya teaches the rule for reading names: “When a name is being heard, do not write it down at once. First say, ‘Present.’” Ba lays bare the distance between the facts of Gangesha’s life—caste, marriage and birth—and the practice of research: “You have read the scripture; have you read the story of Gangesha’s body?” Meera stops the filmmaker: “Capturing a face is hunting. Ask permission first.” Instead of showing the team photographs, Gop Kumar walks them along the route on the ground map, from the stump to the bridge, the bridge to

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Chapter 66 — The Harvard Research Team

the pond, and the pond to a labourer’s widow’s house. Before the camera the widow does not cover her face with her veil. She looks steadily at them and says, “Do not write down my face; write my husband’s name … Write that he is present.” Much of the researchers’ notebook remains blank. The young man admits, “Here we are finding questions,” and Ba answers, “If you do not find questions, how will you find justice?” At night Gangesha’s name is again read with the response “Present.” At the end, as the filmmaker cleans his lens, he sees a crocodile’s eye rather than his own face in the dust and lowers the camera. The act of looking itself has been placed in the dock.

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Chapter 67 — Meera and the Right to Be Seen

Part 1 · The Main Story

The Harvard team returns on the second day in a hurry, hungry to collect material. Ira stops them at the outer circle. A student called Martha says in broken Maithili that they want to “bring suffering to the world.” Ira asks, “Where do we want to go—to the world, or to our own home?” Meera, herself a survivor of blackmail, steps forward and establishes a five-point “watch over seeing”: no faces without permission; no spectacle of weeping; and no turning caste-based suffering into a “social example.” Hearing the account of Gangesha and caste, Jagdish Ram, an elderly leatherworker, comes forward and writes in Satyavrat’s notebook with his own hand, “My gaze, too, is evidence.” A young researcher’s camera suddenly goes dark and

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Chapter 67 — Meera and the Right to Be Seen

displays the words, “You saw, but were you seen?” In the evening Martha requests Meera’s permission and takes only a photograph of the red thread, not a face, agreeing to record its story in Meera’s own words. After the team leaves, an advertisement for Chandrapal Batra’s memorial app is found beside the stump: “Tribute Image Collection Opening Soon.” Ananya identifies it as “the first doorway to the theft of names.”

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Chapter 68 — Devika Versus the Memorial App

Part 1 · The Main Story

Chandrapal Batra’s memorial app, operating under the name “People’s Memory Service Association,” proposes placing shiny symbols upon the stones bearing names. Devika tries to enter “the one whose name was not found” into the app, but the screen repeatedly rejects it: “Please enter a full name.” This reveals that the incomplete, unnamed and caste-unidentified will not be admitted to this app. Devika goes directly to Chandrapal’s new office, the “Cultural Memory Cooperation Centre,” where a picture of Channa Grove hangs on the wall, completely green and never cut down. Chandrapal admits that “the system needs data.” In a back room Devika is stunned to find the words “high emotional reach” beside Ujjwal’s name, but does not take a

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Chapter 68 — Devika Versus the Memorial App

photograph: she will not commit theft in order to stop theft. At a public meeting she exposes how the app operates, and the children establish a new rule: “Before putting someone’s name on a screen, obtain the permission of their people.” Satyavrat Mehta writes, “A name belongs with the dead person’s people, memory and justice, not with the market.” That night many phones flash a notification: “Your loved one’s name has been added to the Garh Narikel Memory Collection.” Ujjwal’s mother is wounded by it. At dawn the children find that somebody has scratched the lettering off three stones during the night. “From today the theft of names had begun.”

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Chapter 69 — The Theft of Names

After Devika’s exposure of the app, a deeper, more literal theft comes to light. The name “Sarayu Mandal” on a register page has become an illegible blot, and the surface of her stone is smooth, stripped of its name. Seven names are now classified as “unverified” in this way, including on the digital list. Marks have also disappeared from Gop Kumar’s files. Ananya repeats Gangesha’s question: “What is evidence? What is written, or what is held in memory?” Meera meets Sarayu’s sister Rakhi, who asks, “Has my father’s story been erased?” A person’s gait and surviving clothes are evidence too. Batuknath Hariharan returns with his proposal for a trust and tries to evade the question “Who owns a name?” by saying “in the public

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Chapter 69 — The Theft of Names

interest.” Meera gives a sharp reply. The children decide to hold seven days of readings, one for each of the seven erased names. On the first day they lift the stone of Sarayu Mandal and find beneath it a shape in the earth resembling a map of the pond. Water glimmers in it that night, and Budhba’s voice says, “When a name is erased, water keeps it.” The chapter ends with Ananya writing, “Tomorrow the pond will be heard.”

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Chapter 70 — Panidubbi’s Testimony

Part 1 · The Main Story

The villagers gather beside the old pond of the Kamla-Balan, where Panidubbi dwells. Meera and Devika repeat the rules governing the watch over seeing. As a blurred name is read, bubbles rise from the pond, followed by a leaf upon which the sound of the name emerges of its own accord. Satyavrat Mehta says, “If the letters written by society have become lies, the reflections in nature too may become evidence.” A circle of darkness forms in the pond’s centre, and Panidubbi speaks in a voice made of many voices, neither woman nor man: “The reflection of a name submerged in water cannot be stolen.” Ananya asks, “And the name that was never written at all?” Panidubbi replies, “Its burden is the heaviest. Set the first stone for it.”

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Chapter 70 — Panidubbi’s Testimony

On Meera’s question about privacy, Panidubbi repeats the principle of the watch over seeing: “Do not bring an image to the shore without permission.” When the bogus donation page from Chandrapal’s app opens on Gop’s phone, it disintegrates as soon as the screen is held over the water: “The accounting of those who earn from names is kept not by water, but by mud.” At the end Panidubbi warns, “Do not merely save the name; save its game as well. A name that plays kabaddi will remain a breath.” The next morning fresh posters appear on the village walls: “Channa Grove Ghost Kabaddi Festival: Tickets, Lights, Sound.” The market in memory is preparing to turn the real game into theatre.

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Chapter 71 — The Procession of False Ghosts

Part 1 · The Main Story

A commercial troupe organises a ticketed performance in the village called “Channa Grove Night Experience: Ghost Kabaddi Procession.” It uses the real roots as a backdrop, artificial smoke and hired performers. Asked by Meera, “Did you seek the families’ permission?” the organiser pretends not to understand. The fake kabaddi lacks the rhythm of breath, and the children write down their observations: “The breath broke; there was no name; the earth did not answer.” Suddenly an actor steps upon a warm line in the roots and, instead of delivering his rehearsed words, calls out his real father’s name—a labourer who died in a mine in a distant district. Other performers begin giving genuine testimony too, speaking the names of mothers,

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Chapter 71 — The Procession of False Ghosts

maternal uncles and people they loved. Acting turns into testimony. A child actor says “Present” instead of making a frightening sound. Devika and Meera oblige the organiser to refund the money. That night the performers take off their fake costumes, lay them beside the stones and pledge to learn to keep watch instead of acting. After midnight a mysterious, faintly mocking laugh rises from within the stump. Ba says, “When memory begins to be sold but still survives, the grove laughs.”

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Chapter 72 — The Laughter of Channa Grove

Part 1 · The Main Story

The laughter from the stump continues to echo until dawn. The letters on the stones grow darker, and Ananya says, “The grove did not laugh; the grove answered.” The municipality records it in its file as an “unscientific rumour,” yet in the ears of the people it settles like evidence. When the children ask, “What proves laughter?” a quiet little girl replies, “The voice that rises when grief refuses to be sold is proof of justice.” The machinery of Chandrapal’s memorial app tries to record the laughter but captures only emptiness. Each listener hears instead the name of their own crime. Edward Broom’s adviser suggests making “positive use” of it, while Broom himself hears that laughter within the applause at Harvard. Meera

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Chapter 72 — The Laughter of Channa Grove

declares, “No one owns laughter … This is not entertainment; this laughter is refusal.” Journalists leave with blank notebooks, for the children’s replies make them realise that “Garh Narikel is not news; it is a test.” Batuknath Hariharan tries to write “preservation of cultural laughter,” but the aspirated first sound of the word “laughter” flashes like a crocodile’s mouth and he drops his pen. At night kabaddi is revived. An old ghost-player teaches the children, “Whoever returns bearing a name will save the game.” In the closing scene Batuknath dreams of an “inner court” of Channa Grove sprouting in his chest, where the laughter gives its answer: “Perception: greed. Inference: delay. Testimony: justice. Truth: laughter.”

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Chapter 72 — The Laughter of Channa Grove

This opens the door to the next chapter, “Batuknath’s Dream Court.”

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Chapter 73 — Batuknath’s Dream Court

The laughter of Channa Grove continues to ring in Batuknath’s ears throughout the night. He sits down to draft his “People’s Memory Trust,” but the ink spreads and turns into leaves. In his sleep he reaches the familiar Bar Council auditorium, where the chairs become roots and Gangesha Upadhyaya himself appears, accompanied by his wife from the leatherworking community. Gangesha asks, “Have you learned to hear a name, or only a lineage?” The shadows of Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha “Ashok” try to edit the truth of Gangesha’s life, an act the dream judge calls “honour killing.” Batuknath is accused of “turning justice into a profession and directing people away from justice.” The words with which he tries to defend

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Chapter 73 — Batuknath’s Dream Court

himself—procedure, jurisdiction—turn into dry leaves and fall away. He tries to flee behind the fence of caste, but the leatherworker woman uproots it: “Justice that fears the touch of a body is not justice; it is hypocrisy freshly bathed.” The shadow of a little girl asks whether Gangesha’s wife and the nameless will find a place in the trust. Batuknath’s silence becomes evidence against him. Budhba’s ghost challenges him to kabaddi, but he cannot draw breath. Gangesha tells him, “In justice, you must perform the act of rising yourself. The first condition is to descend from the throne of your lineage.” Batuknath’s titles fall away until only “Batuk,” a frightened child, remains. On waking, he finds the words of his draft

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Chapter 73 — Batuknath’s Dream Court

mysteriously altered: “chairman” has become “last listener,” and “fund” has become “the watch over names in the children’s hands.” In his cupboard he finds an old note from Chandrapal Batra reading “memorial application secured.” At the chapter’s end, the laughter leaves Batuknath and moves towards Chandrapal’s screen.

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Chapter 74 — Chandrapal’s First Admission

Chandrapal Batra sits alone in his glass-walled room. Every figure on the memorial app turns into a name—Ujjwal Jha, Munna Paswan, Sarayu. In the mirror, instead of his own eyes he sees the eyes of the “users,” and screams. The next morning, exhausted and broken, he arrives at Channa Grove without a driver or any of the trappings of special honour. No one makes a noise. They merely wait, which frightens him more. Ananya asks, “Your birth name, or your business name?” He gives his childhood name: “Chandu.” Meera makes the condition clear: “Weeping is not evidence. Speak the truth alongside the names.” Chandrapal admits part of what he has done: “I did not regard people as people. I thought of them as a crowd behind a screen … I

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Chapter 74 — Chandrapal’s First Admission

did not make the effort to look at their faces.” Devika demands an account of the money earned from Ujjwal’s name. Chandrapal hands her a sheet of paper. She replies, “An account is not equal to a name, but without an account the next struggle will remain incomplete.” He sits beside the stones until evening. In the darkness he tries to send Raghav Signal the message, “Stop. The names have risen.” It does not go through. Instead, letters shaped like leaves appear on the screen: “Where names are heard, codes cannot reach.” The chapter makes clear that the first admission is not the end of punishment but the latch on the next door. Raghav’s turn is coming.

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Chapter 75 — Raghav Signal Without a Network

Part 1 · The Main Story

After Chandrapal’s admission, every message Raghav Somani sends—to Batuknath, Chandrapal, Broom’s assistant and Lau Kin-hung—shows as “sent,” but none reaches its destination. Names and leaves—Ujjwal, Sarayu, Munna—sprout of their own accord on the black screen of his switched-off phone. A voice says, “Before sending a message you used to choose its recipient; now names will choose their own recipients.” In his old paper notebook, the word “percentage” changes itself into “promise.” At Garh Narikel, the children play kabaddi, calling “Present, present”; on Raghav’s phone an empty message arrives with the subject “Present,” from an unnamed sender. Every defensive phrase he attempts—“I was only the messenger”—is struck down by the

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Chapter 75 — Raghav Signal Without a Network

phone's reply: "The intrusion was what you did inside the house of names." Budhba's ghost tells him, "A network breaks wherever a lie seeks passage … Truth needs relationships, not a network." By morning, a map of the network of memory glows on all Raghav's phones, and the name "Lau Kin-hung" appears on it of its own accord. At the end, without a phone or a code, Raghav speaks a full name for the first time: "Lau Kin-hung." Far from setting him free, this proves to be a frightening first step.

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Chapter 76 — Lau Kin-hung’s Journey to India

Part 1 · The Main Story

In his glass building Lau Kin-hung studies an image of Garh Narikel and feels that “the data is silent, while the picture is looking back at him.” In a dream that night, crocodiles in the river chew up papers, contracts and deeds of donation. One of them asks, “In which water is your name written?” Lau decides to travel to India, publicly describing his visit as a “review of cultural and rehabilitation investments.” He is disturbed to see Gangesha’s name entered in a file under “risk table.” In the aircraft, amid the clouds, he hears the chant “kabaddi, kabaddi” and remembers his poor childhood: the smell of fish, fear of debt and his father’s bent back. An elderly Indian passenger beside him shows him a newspaper account of Garh

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Chapter 76 — Lau Kin-hung’s Journey to India

Narikel’s festival of names. “There,” the man says, “the names of the dead live ... What if the server shuts down? Paper burns, but if children have heard a name, it begins a second life.” In a dream the figure of Gangesha asks him directly, “What is the proof of profit? How will you calculate the loss of someone who has no name?” After landing in Delhi, Lau sees a crocodile instead of his reflection in the airport glass. It seems to ask, “Have you come bearing names, or nameless profit?” At the end he tells his interpreter, “Straight to Garh Narikel. The longer we delay, the longer the crocodile will stare without blinking.”

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Chapter 77 — A Crocodile at the Airport

Part 1 · The Main Story

Lau Kin-hung’s plane lands in India. For an instant the screen of the immigration face-matching machine shows a crocodile’s eye instead of his face. The television in the guest lounge carries a report on Garh Narikel’s festival of names. Lau asks, “Haven’t the children been removed?” His assistant answers, “Remove them, and they will spread into still more places.” Nearby, an elderly passenger reading a Maithili newspaper shows him the Garh Narikel story and asks, “What if the server shuts down? If the children have listened, a name begins its second life.” In a dream the figure of Gangesha asks, “What is the proof of profit? How can you count the loss of those without names?” A mysterious elderly cleaner in the lounge, who

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Chapter 77 — A Crocodile at the Airport

appears neither in the records nor on the cameras, tells him, “Think of a name while drinking water, and the water will remain clean.” Without being told, the car driver asks, “Garh Narikel?” That night Lau dreams of children asking him, “Your real name?” while a crocodile chews through the pages of an account book, releasing the voices of workers, young people and women. By morning a brief message from Satyavrat Mehta arrives: “If you have come to hear names, come,” directing him to a waiting room on the old airport road.

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Chapter 78 — The Silent Dialogue Between Satyavrat and Lau

Part 1 · The Main Story 1 / 3

Satyavrat Mehta invites Lau Kin-hung not to his office but to the stump of Channa Grove. “If names frighten you, there is no purpose in meeting.” Lau listens to a reading of names. At the fourteenth name, a line inside the stump flashes red for a moment. When Lau says, “I want proof,” Satyavrat invokes Gangesha’s means of knowledge—perception, inference and testimony—and adds a “fourth suffering,” spoken by the body itself. “You have counted profits. For once, count names.” Ananya asks Lau to write his name on a stone, with its pronunciation in Devanagari. The stone feels heavy in his hand. Satyavrat explains, “This is not forgiveness yet, only presence.” Batuknath learns that Lau is suspending his pledge of donation, damaging

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Chapter 78 — The Silent Dialogue Between Satyavrat and Lau

the trust scheme. That night the children give Lau a place to sleep in an ordinary classroom. He dreams of a “nameless planet” where all the buildings have numbers but no names. Channa Grove sprouts there, and the children play kabaddi until contracts and donation deeds fall out of his pockets. On waking, he hears the word “Present” from outside and understands it for the first time without translation: “Escape is impossible.” In the morning Satyavrat halts Lau’s proposal to donate: “Before donation, documents; before documents, names; before names, listening.” At the end a messenger from Edward Broom arrives with a golden deed of donation. Ananya puts out an empty stone for him too and says, “Now the donation will be asked its

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Chapter 78 — The Silent Dialogue Between Satyavrat and Lau

name.”

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Chapter 79 — Broom’s Deed of Donation

Part 1 · The Main Story

A polished deed arrives from Edward Broom’s “World Memory Restoration Fund,” offering a “compassionate grant for the Channa Grove Centre for the Memory of Suffering.” The representative claims the donation is “selfless,” but questioning by Devika, Meera and Gop Kumar reveals that one clause—“the fund’s priority right of use over jointly communicated materials”—would confer ownership of memory. Gop says, “Today it will take names; tomorrow pictures; the day after, voices; and then even tears will belong to it.” Ba smells the paper and says, “This does not smell of weeping. It smells of a locked room.” Suddenly a drop of rain falls on the deed’s seal. As the paper grows wet, old clauses from a bridge contract emerge beneath it,

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Chapter 79 — Broom’s Deed of Donation

concerning worker safety and compensation. The donation document is exposed as a mask. Satyavrat Mehta writes, “When a donation conceals the record of a crime, it is not a donation but a defence made too late.” At the chapter’s end Batuknath’s child—whose name is revealed in the next chapter as Tarini—asks him directly, “Father, is this meant to save justice, or to save a profession?”

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Chapter 80 — Hariharan’s Child

Late at night Tarini, Batuknath’s child and a law student, confronts her father at home: “Did you honour Gangesha, or did you shut down his questions?” She brings specific accusations. The labourers’ case was dismissed on technical grounds; Ujjwal’s case was diverted by arguments about digital consent; Meera’s privacy complaint was turned into a question about her character. For the first time in his own home Batuknath feels like “an accused outsider.” Tarini shows him an old booklet of his speeches, “Mithila Is a Land of Reason,” and raises the silence over Gangesha’s caste history. She calls the editorial suppression by Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha “honour killing.” In a dreamlike moment, Batuknath’s veranda turns into the

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Chapter 80 — Hariharan’s Child

stump of Channa Grove. The children of other culpable fathers, implicated in medicine fraud, gambling and foreign donations, also appear. All ask, “What will you leave us?” Tarini announces that any trust must be run by “children, labourers’ families and the women’s assembly”; Batuknath may have “presence” there, not the chairmanship. In the morning he writes “Proposal for People’s Memory Trust postponed,” strikes it out and replaces it with “The proposal shall be heard before the people’s watch.” Before leaving, Tarini removes a garland from a certificate of honour and says, “Gangesha needs questions, not garlands.” At the end Chandrapal Batra sits alone and tries to write his full name for the first time, but his pen sticks at

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Chapter 80 — Hariharan’s Child

“Batra.”

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Chapter 81 — Batra’s Unfinished Name

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

Chandrapal Batra finds a blank white sheet before him in his room. On it are the words, “Write your name.” Whenever he attempts to do so, the pen writes “ten per cent,” “half the profit,” or “commission” of its own accord. He realises that throughout his life he has written marks of profit where names ought to have been. He remembers the slate of his childhood and his mother’s warning: “Channu, do not bring disgrace on your name.” He tries to write “Channu,” but his hand stops after the first letter. His arm grows heavy, as if held by a crocodile’s teeth. That night he weeps for the first time, not to beg for pity but as evidence that the ruin within him has touched him too. In Garh Narikel, Ananya opens a new page in the

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Chapter 81 — Batra’s Unfinished Name

register headed “Unfinished Name.” Ba says plainly, “A crime is written down for evidence, not for forgiveness.” Satyavrat Mehta adds, “Justice asks not only for the victims’ names, but also for the criminals’ real names.” By morning the sheet folds itself into a leaf and sticks to the windowpane. In the glass Chandrapal sees not his own face but an elephant’s eye, with the jaws of a crocodile behind it. Ananya closes the chapter by announcing, “Next time the inner Elephant and Crocodile will play.”

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Chapter 82 — The Elephant and Crocodile Within

Part 1 · The Main Story

A collective “inner vision” opens upon Channa’s stump. Inside each deceiver appears a different elephant, representing suppressed truth, and a crocodile, representing greed or fear. Within Batuknath Hariharan, the elephant is the love of justice he had as a child, and the crocodile is professional deceit; his child’s question, “Did you save justice, or the profession?” goes on echoing. Inside Chandrapal is a boy who wants to write his name, while the crocodile continually makes him into a “broker” and a “wallet.” Devika asks, “If he has no letters left for his own name, how can he protect anyone else’s?” Inside Raghav Signal is a transparent elephant, constantly being erased; his greatest pain is that he was never given a

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Chapter 82 — The Elephant and Crocodile Within

“complete sentence.” Within Lau Kin-hung is an enormous elephant locked in a cage. Names—Sarayu, Ujjwal, Munna—appear on the glass. The crocodile says, “Names are losses,” and the elephant replies, “Without names, profit turns to stone.” Within Edward Broom appears an elephant hungry for applause, although his full examination is still to come. Satyavrat Mehta says of himself, “Do not spare me either,” and Ananya writes, “A witness is not exempt from examination.” At the end all the inner elephants merge into a single collective elephant, while names fall upon the water. The children keep saying “Present,” and the crocodile’s grip loosens, but there is no complete release. Budhba’s ghost says, “The accounting of crimes will

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Chapter 82 — The Elephant and Crocodile Within

remain; but unless you see the elephant within, you will not recognise the crocodile’s kind.” The children establish a new rule: “We will read not only the names of the dead, but also search for the names trapped inside the living.” Ananya opens a page titled “Coconut-Leaf School.”

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Chapter 83 — The Coconut-Leaf School

Part 1 · The Main Story

After the night of the inner elephant and crocodile, Ananya begins creating a “school” behind the stump—not to secure government recognition but to teach people to hear names. Ba calls it the “Coconut-Leaf School”: “A coconut leaf catches the wind from far away. This school will catch people’s voices in the same way.” Its plan has four corners—name, privacy, labour and breath—with the stump at the centre and an empty bowl above. Devika, Meera, Gop and Satyavrat Mehta write four lines upon its walls. Satyavrat writes, “Here silence, too, is testimony, provided it arises from listening rather than fear.” The children write on dried coconut leaves, using only indications and leaving empty spaces: “If we write a story closed, where

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Chapter 83 — The Coconut-Leaf School

will the next human being speak?” When the hands of a child from the leatherworking community and a Brahmin child touch the same leaf, a green line flashes. Ba says, “The Tattvachintamani opens not only in a book but also between two hands.” An elderly pandit objects that “Gangesha’s story is unverified.” Ananya asks, “Then what evidence is there for pride in caste?” By evening the coconut-leaf pavilion is ready. At night Ananya strikes the empty bowl softly three times and announces, “Today the school has opened ... Here those who are absent will be called first.”

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Chapter 84 — The First Lesson: Present

The first lesson at the school is not the alphabet, but the act of saying “Present.” The first child speaks the name of his grandmother, whose real name was never spoken in the house: Sitamoni. A second child, Sonaki, speaks the name of her maternal uncle Bholaram, who drowned in the river but never appeared on any list. A third child gives the name of his leatherworker great-grandfather, Manglu Das. Meera insists, “The name of the person whose labour kept everyone going must be written at the foundation,” and Devika writes it in the middle of the page. The question of suppressed truths in Gangesha’s life rises again. The register receives the entry “The suppressed truth of Gangesha’s life—Present.” One child cannot finish

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Chapter 84 — The First Lesson: Present

speaking the name of his sister, who was struck from the school rolls because of violence. Meera writes, “One daughter—present with dignity.” When an elderly pandit protests, Ira replies, “If a system eats the names of the dead, that too must be called a crocodile.” An elderly woman brings out an amulet and speaks her mother’s name, Phulkumari, which she had been forbidden to say in her married home. The amulet’s thread unties itself. By evening “Present” has become a new form of civic address in the village. As women begin quietly speaking of domestic violence, dowry and killings over love, Meera announces, “The next lesson: the women’s night assembly.”

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Chapter 85 — The Women’s Night Assembly

Part 1 · The Main Story

1 / 2

After the school’s first day, women quietly gather around Channa’s stump at night, without announcement or platform. Ujjwal’s mother lays down an old shirt of her son’s and says, “He was defeated by that social silence which, out of fear of shame, will not let a family speak of fraud at home.” Devika says, “The fraudster sits abroad and operates accounts, while the family breaks a pot of shame over the victim’s head.” The widow of a bridge worker, identified in the register only as “Munna’s wife,” gives her name as Phulkumari: “When a labourer’s feet sink into the earth, the feet of the woman at home sink with them.” Ira calls the suppression of the memory of Gangesha’s leatherworker wife “a great theft of a name.” Ba declares,

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Chapter 85 — The Women’s Night Assembly

Part 1 · The Main Story

“If we cannot read the name of even one woman in our society, whom are twelve thousand books meant to serve?” Meera introduces the rule of the red thread: a woman who has told her story will keep the thread on her own wrist; it will not become a public possession. One young woman wants to be recorded without giving her name, only as “Confidentially present.” Soumya leaves a blank page entitled “Evidence of the Body”: “An empty space is also a document.” By the end five principles have been established, concerning consent, caste violence, the shame placed upon victims of fraud, women’s names and the dignity of privacy. Phulkumari says, “Tomorrow we shall read the feet of labourers.”

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Chapter 86 — The Labourer’s Feet

The children go towards the unfinished bridge, where the labourers’ names had been dropped from the accounts. Munna Paswan’s uncle arrives first, puts his cracked foot into a bowl of earth and leaves its imprint upon a leaf. “My brother’s sweat fell here. His name is not on the paper, but the pressure of a foot remains.” Ira writes, “The foot of Munna Paswan’s uncle: labour present.” Gradually the women of workers’ families make footprints as well. Devika asks, “Are the feet that walked to bring food not labour too?” Aruni, the engineer, admits, “A bridge that does not preserve the names of the workers is an unfinished bridge.” Chandrapal Batra’s people arrive with a plaque reading “Memorial Wall to Martyred Workers,” but the

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Chapter 86 — The Labourer’s Feet

Part 1 · The Main Story 2 / 2

children insist that the footprints be read first. Meera adds a rule: no image of a footprint may be used without the consent of the person who made it. The children play a new version of kabaddi: “Feet on this side, paper on the other. Any paper that refuses to acknowledge the feet by name is out.” Satyavrat Mehta removes his shoes and offers to place his feet down, but Ananya says, “Not your feet. Your silence has already been recorded.” His rejection, too, becomes part of justice. At the end a new section called “The Record of Feet” opens in the register. Ananya announces, “Tomorrow the screens will remain off at the school … We shall make the screen that chews up our minds all day undergo one day’s fast.”

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Chapter 87 — A Fast from Screens

The children organise a voluntary one-day “fast from screens” throughout the village: not a fast from food but a fast of the eyes. People voluntarily deposit their devices in a “screen pot.” Devika, Meera and finally Satyavrat Mehta hand in their phones too. Satyavrat confesses, “For many years, as soon as the phone rang, I rose and went away from the voices of people.” Ba puts down his spectacles and says, “Today I shall listen.” Instead of reading names, they spend the day reading faces, hearing old stories, memories of floods and accounts of fraud. Gop Kumar writes the list of names by hand. In response to an old farmer’s story, the children write, “The phone does not eat the field; it eats solitude.” In their new form of

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Chapter 87 — A Fast from Screens

kabaddi, each child crossing the line speaks a name rather than chanting “kabaddi,” and when the child’s breath breaks, the others join in to finish that person’s story. Shopkeepers keep their ledgers by hand, and for the first time relationships become visible, including which widow takes rice on credit. The numbers recorded by Chandrapal Batra’s app fall that day. When the devices are returned at night, new rules are adopted: no image of weeping without permission, and no reading a fraudulent message alone. At the end Ira looks towards the stars and decides to write to the children of Garh Narikel who live abroad.

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Chapter 88 — Ira’s Letter to the Children Abroad

Part 1 · The Main Story

Ira writes a letter on a coconut leaf to the descendants of Garh Narikel living overseas: “Garh Narikel is not a holiday photograph for you; it is your responsibility.” She gives them a rule: “If you come, do not take a photograph first. First listen to a name … A ghost is a name whose justice has not been completed.” She also includes Gangesha’s story and the “first theft” committed by caste. Copies are sent in several forms—on leaves, on paper and electronically. Replies begin arriving within two days. Neel, or Neelkanth, in Toronto writes, “I pronounce the names incorrectly, but I will learn. Send me the first name.” A girl from Melbourne writes, as does a child in Dubai whose father builds buildings but never has his name

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Chapter 88 — Ira’s Letter to the Children Abroad

inscribed upon them. Each reply contains some version of “I am present, but I have more to learn.” A new stone is therefore set up, inscribed “Present from Afar.” Batuknath’s trust and Broom’s research team try to transform this correspondence into a “diaspora memory network,” but Ira makes the boundary clear: “These letters are not raw material for a trust, an institution or a fundraising appeal … I call them a chain of breath.” At the end Ira sends Satyavrat a question: “How can the testimony of people who are far away and do not know the language be heard?” Satyavrat replies, “At the next hearing the letters from the distant children will be read.”

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Chapter 89 — Satyavrat’s Public Hearing

Part 1 · The Main Story

The first reply from abroad arrives in the form of a map drawn by a child: “Where on this shall I put my grandmother’s name?” It joins the children of the village to children overseas. Satyavrat Mehta holds a public hearing around Channa’s stump, with no stage, chairs or microphone. “Today I am not the chairperson. I am a listener first.” The first testimony comes from an elderly leatherworker woman: “Gangesha was accepted as a scholar, but the caste that sees me making sandals does not wish to see my daughter studying scripture. Who makes the shoes worn by knowledge?” Her question forces Satyavrat to reconsider the limits of evidence. The second testimony comes in a reply to Ira’s letter from abroad. When a teacher told a child

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Chapter 89 — Satyavrat’s Public Hearing

to “correct the spelling” of the grandmother’s name, the child objected: “Grandmother’s name was not a spelling; it was a voice.” The third testimony comes from the son of a labourer: “On paper my father was a temporary worker. In the water he became permanent.” Satyavrat declares, “I will not deliver a verdict; the testimonies will remain in their own forms.” An old message from Raghav Signal, “Turn emotion into content,” is exposed. Satyavrat writes, “To call the people’s memory ‘content’ is a second killing.” By evening the kabaddi game becomes a method of public hearing. At night the empty earthen bowl used for silence grows heavy; it can be lifted only when Ananya touches it. She writes, “The keeping of names needs rules,”

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Chapter 89 — Satyavrat’s Public Hearing

and the children begin drafting their first six rules.

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Chapter 90 — The Constitution of Names

At the school the children write a “Constitution of Names.” The first rule is Devika’s: “Names must not be erased.” The second, Meera’s: “Privacy must not be sold.” The third, Soumya’s, prohibits dishonouring the body. The fourth is Aruni’s: “No contracts shall be imposed upon memory.” The fifth comes from Gangesha’s question: “Justice must not be murdered in the name of caste.” The sixth is Gop’s: “Truth on paper is incomplete without people’s voices.” The seventh comes from the fast from screens: “Do not let convenience become your master.” The eighth comes from kabaddi: “Return before breath breaks, but do not abandon your teammate”—with an indication of the “planet” to come. Ba supplies the ninth: “The first seat belongs to

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Chapter 90 — The Constitution of Names

those whose names were not found.” Satyavrat’s tenth says, “Keep an account of silence: write the criminal’s name, and also the silence of those who watched without speaking.” The eleventh recalls Panidubbi: “Lay no claim to what the water has preserved.” The twelfth comes from Ira’s letter: “A village is not a souvenir of memory but a responsibility.” They debate the thirteenth rule: how should forgiveness work? Finally they decide, “Forgiveness shall be sought through the labour of hearing names, and the profits of crime must first be relinquished.” The fourteenth rule is collective: “Children shall keep watch, the elders shall bear witness, women shall safeguard the law, and labourers shall own the earth.” Asked about a seal,

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Chapter 90 — The Constitution of Names

Ananya applies moist fibre from the stump: “The seal of a root.” The children add their thumbprints. By the end the constitution reaches Batuknath, Chandrapal, Raghav, Lau and Broom in their separate places. “Names must not be erased” glows, for example, on Chandrapal’s device. Yet the perpetrators are absent from the assembly. The question remains whether that absence is a punishment or a new conspiracy.

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Chapter 91 — The Absence of the Deceivers

The children decide that the names of all five deceivers—Batuknath, Chandrapal, Raghav, Lau and Broom—will appear not on the assembly platform but on a page of warnings. “Write the names of their deeds first”: devouring time, trafficking in bodies, the snare of screens, the mask of donations, the arrogance of caste. The criminals’ names are written in very small letters and the wrongs in large ones. Batuknath waits, but no invitation arrives. Chandrapal’s app remains quiet. Raghav receives no signal. Lau Kin-hung is told he has been “placed at the edge,” and has difficulty understanding that this is a punishment. Broom laughs at what he calls “local sentimental politics,” but falls silent when he reads the report. The weight of

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Chapter 91 — The Absence of the Deceivers

the absent deceivers gradually lifts from the shoulders of those who are present. Ananya writes, “Someone’s absence is not a cause for fear when we ourselves are present.” At the end, as a black-bordered page is turned, the criminals’ names become shadows and fall out of the paper onto the earth. The children put stones upon them to dispel the shadows. But by evening an unusually long shadow stretches from the western edge of the stump. Ba calls it “the shadow of the absent.”

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Chapter 92 — The Shadow of the Stump

Part 1 · The Main Story

The stump's unnaturally long, undulating shadow goes on spreading in every direction. The children invent a new form of kabaddi: enter the shadow saying "Present," then emerge and repeat a name. Ba says, "Under the shadow of the stump the mind comes to recognise responsibility." A child asks, "Is a shadow evidence?" Ananya relates the question to Gangesha's four means of knowledge. Meera clarifies, "An image of the shadow may be taken; an image of a face may not." Satyavrat Mehta removes his sandals in the shadow in respect for the testimony of the roots. Batuknath's child brings an old pen belonging to her father. Ananya asks, "Is the pen guilty, or the hand?" The pen is kept outside the stone boundary but inside the space of

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Chapter 92 — The Shadow of the Stump

testimony. Chandrapal’s sheet bearing his incomplete name is also placed upon the shadow’s outer line. In his glass room, Lau Kin-hung sees the same wavy shadow. Even after he pulls the curtains it enters the room. In moonlight it turns, paradoxically, into a silver line. Ba says, “A shadow made of memory remains light even in darkness.” Towards midnight the smell of water rises from the Kamla-Balan, and black clouds move over Garh Narikel. The shadow lengthens towards the water and touches the names on the stones as though carrying news of danger. Ananya immediately orders copies of the names to be made. At dawn the first raindrop falls upon the stone marked “The One Whose Name Was Not Found.” Ba says, “The water told those

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Chapter 92 — The Shadow of the Stump

without names first." The chapter ends with the clear approach of a flood from the Kamla-Balan.

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Chapter 93 — Flood Again

Part 1 · The Main Story

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Another flood warning comes from the Kamla-Balan. Ananya announces, “This time we shall save not only the grove, but the names.” Along with rice, animals and children, the villagers carry the Constitution of Names, registers, stones and red thread to higher ground. Devika and Nishant keep mobile phones in controlled use. Gop Kumar warns, “Paper may become wet; we need copies.” Ananya responds, “The copies will be made not on paper but in throats.” The children begin memorising ten names each. Rain bursts over them. Instead of carrying away all the stones, the children press impressions of them into the soil and mark the places with coconut leaves. Budhba’s ghost becomes plainly visible in the rain and asks, “Who will stop

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Chapter 93 — Flood Again

kabaddi? In a flood the real test is of breath.” The children enter the water, playing kabaddi as they make boats of names. At midnight the green point on the stump glimmers beneath the water: “The grove is reading the water.” Before dawn long black shapes and shining eyes appear upon the surface. “Now they too are coming back”—the return of the crocodiles.

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Chapter 94 — The Return of the Crocodiles

The crocodiles return to the village in the floodwater. At first people are afraid, but Ananya explains, “The crocodiles are not attacking. They are swimming in circles, creatures that maintain a boundary.” The largest stops in line with the stump and stares towards its roots. Ba interprets the tale of the elephant and crocodile anew: “A crocodile eats the body, but if a name remains alive, the inner bond can be severed.” The stone inscribed “The One Whose Name Was Not Found” floats out into the water and reaches the crocodiles’ circle. The largest crocodile nudges it back towards the bank. The children record, “The crocodile returned the protection of the nameless.” An elderly boatman says, “Crocodiles circle around a corpse

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Chapter 94 — The Return of the Crocodiles

left without a name. Give it a name, and the water settles.” Satyavrat Mehta stops at the landing when the people call to him and says, “I have read the names that survived. To those not found, I owe the debt of listening.” Far away in the city, Lau Kin-hung, Batuknath, Chandrapal and Raghav each experience the effect of the crocodiles or water: Chandrapal’s screen tells him, “Verify names,” while Raghav’s messages will not send. At night the crocodiles slowly withdraw. The last great crocodile turns in the water and traces a circle like a kabaddi court—or a planet’s orbit. By morning no one throws stones at them; everyone quietly cleans the landing. At the end Ira receives news from abroad that a company associated with Lau,

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Chapter 94 — The Return of the Crocodiles

Broom and Chandrapal has proposed purchasing the flood-affected memory area under the name “Water Security and Future Habitation Project.” “The next lesson will be a bargain.”

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Chapter 95 — Lau Kin-hung’s Final Bargain

Part 1 · The Main Story

In the midst of the flood, Lau Kin-hung prepares a “final bargain” from his glass office. It is wrapped in the bright language of flood relief, a school and a hospital, but the conditions would turn the children who keep watch into “trained volunteers,” transfer the reading of names to an “expert committee,” and place the land of Channa’s stump under “joint management.” A confidential appendix hints at a distant—possibly extraterrestrial—housing project called “Nameless Settlement,” proposing to carry talented children and bearers of cultural memory to a “safe place for the future.” Ira understands this as “the first advertisement for a dream of leaving Earth.” The letter comes by boat and is placed in the split of a bamboo pole.

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Chapter 95 — Lau Kin-hung’s Final Bargain

Part 1 · The Main Story

Ananya says, “First this paper must listen.” As Satyavrat Mehta reads the letter, the green spot on the stump trembles at the sentence converting the “children’s watch” into “trained volunteers.” Ba says, “If the keepers of the watch are renamed, the watch itself will change.” Crocodiles swim in circles around the raised platform, like markers of a boundary. Ananya announces, “We shall not answer on paper,” and a reading of names—Sarayu, Ujjwal, Gangesha and others—begins in the flood. Gop Kumar releases the voices into the open sky rather than into a file. A corner of the bargain on Lau’s desk grows wet, and he acknowledges, “These people do not even want to leave their Earth.” Ananya writes in the register, “The bargain

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Chapter 95 — Lau Kin-hung’s Final Bargain

arrived, was heard, and was not called rejected; it was sentenced to listen to names.” At the end Batuknath Hariharan stands ankle-deep in floodwater, empty-handed, with no document, and says, “Allow me to listen to names for one night. I must change the caste of my ears.”

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Chapter 96 — Batuknath’s Belated Apology

On the third day of the flood Batuknath Hariharan arrives alone at Channa’s stump, on dusty feet, without a file, a car or a lawyer. “I have come to ask forgiveness.” Satyavrat Mehta replies, “Not from me, but from all those whose names are read here.” Ananya collects his phone, and a reading of names continues through the night: Sarayu, Ujjwal, Munna Paswan, Gangesha and others. With each name Batuknath’s old arguments of defence—“That was the procedure,” “The judiciary is independent”—grow weaker. At Gangesha’s name he admits, “I am guilty … I turned names into cases, not human beings. I turned justice into a profession.” A young man shouts in anger. Meera says, “Anger, too, is present. It must have a place.” At dawn the last

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Chapter 96 — Batuknath’s Belated Apology

name is “Nameless.” Batuknath struggles to answer “Present,” but finally manages it in a whisper. Ananya explains, “Forgiveness is not a decision but a practice. Tomorrow the names will be read again.” Batuknath returns empty-handed, without a certificate. At the end the word “medium” flashes on Chandrapal Batra’s screen in place of “credit” and “debit.” He mutters, “I only moved the money.” The screen answers, “Mule.”

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Chapter 97 — Chandrapal’s Mule Account

Sitting alone in his room, Chandrapal Batra applies Gangesha’s questions about evidence to his own life. “Perception: the money that came into my hands. Inference: Lau Kin-hung’s orders. Testimony: Raghav’s disappearing messages. Comparison: I myself—a mule that carries a load without being its owner.” The numbers in his ledger begin to look like faces: a young victim of a digital-arrest scam, a mother who was cheated, workers’ families denied compensation. He remembers his first day at school, when a teacher distorted his name. “He who suffered so much when his own name was spoiled converted the names of thousands of people into accounts.” In the floodwater outside his window he sees tiny accounts floating, each marked

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Chapter 97 — Chandrapal’s Mule Account

“through.” He tries to write his name, but the pen keeps writing “percentage.” Finally he manages to write, “Chandrapal Batra, mule account through which wrongdoing passed.” A wet leaf slips through the gap beneath the door and asks, “Whose account was it?” He writes back, “Mine too.” He understands that every account has become a crocodile chewing up names, while the real owner remains invisible. He tries to message Raghav, “I was an intermediary, but not innocent,” but the message turns into a leaf stuck to the screen. By morning he has wrapped his papers and leaves in cloth. Limping through the floodwater towards Channa Grove, he says, “Write my name in full, but write my percentage too.” At the end Raghav’s phone flashes one

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Chapter 97 — Chandrapal’s Mule Account

last time: “The message will not be erased.”

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Chapter 98 — Raghav’s Last Message

Part 1 · The Main Story

Raghav Somani sits in his room surrounded by five devices, but his messages no longer receive answers. He tries to write his full name, “Raghav Somani,” but the screen produces “Raghav Signal Somani,” as though his nickname has become a shackle. He tries to send messages to Chandrapal, Batuknath, Lau and Broom, but nothing goes through. At last he writes, “I am afraid,” and a reply from an unnamed source appears: “Present.” Slowly he writes messages without sending them. Finally he sends, “The account is not closed; the soul has opened.” This message cannot be deleted. It becomes a green line, then the veins of a leaf, while the room fills with the raw smell of coconut. Meanwhile, at midnight in Garh Narikel, a green leaf flies

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Chapter 98 — Raghav’s Last Message

onto the edge of the stump bearing the same words: “The account is not closed; the soul has opened.” Ananya puts a stone under the leaf marked “Waiting.” Meera says, “Without responsibility, an admission is incomplete.” Waking in the city, Raghav discovers that this particular message is absent from the digital world but present in the world of memory. The reversal breaks something inside him. He begins writing on paper: “What I kept silent was a crime.” Yet he cannot continue beyond that single line. Satyavrat Mehta calls the leaf “not testimony, but the door to testimony.” Asked by Ananya, “Who will testify?” he answers, “Those who did not speak when it mattered must speak first. I too.” At the end a new fine line appears on

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Chapter 98 — Raghav’s Last Message

the leaf: “The debt of listening remains.” It signals that Satyavrat Mehta’s own testimony has now become necessary.

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Chapter 99 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Testimony

After Raghav’s leaf arrives, Satyavrat Mehta sits down to write his own testimony without a heading, seal or official title. It takes him a long time to write the first sentence: “Many times I could have spoken in time, but I did not speak.” He acknowledges that in the case of the bridge labourers he wrote “the procedure is under way” and remained silent; at the hospital he accepted the language of a report about the lack of breath; in cases of digital fraud he confined himself to the boundaries of a lawsuit; and in the matter of women’s privacy he demanded “evidence” without recognising the victim’s fear as evidence. He connects his conduct to Gangesha’s question: “What can a society gain from honouring a book when it has cut

Chapter 99 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Testimony

away the inconvenient truth of a life? I too repeatedly cut away inconvenient truths by calling them procedural difficulties. That was the caste system of my silence.” He admits that signing a serial number was easy, while lifting his eyes to face a name was difficult. At the end of his testimony he asks for punishment to be considered against himself: “Make public the history of my office, the delays in my decisions and the names of those who benefited from my silence.” He warns, “If my testimony is ever turned into a memorial or an award, the children will reject it.” Ananya places the page between the stones rather than in the register. For the first time in daylight, Budhba’s ghost appears in a complete earth-coloured form

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Chapter 99 — Satyavrat Mehta’s Testimony

and says, “Listening requires not only ears but hands. Next time, when the crocodile grips the elephant, there must be not only a call from the elephant but also a hand to hold it.” This leaves open the question whether testimony will merely be heard or whether someone will also be saved. At the end Satyavrat’s testimony is affixed in the middle of the register with the words, “Silence, now seated under a sentence of listening,” and the children respond, “Present.” Far off in the floodwater, a huge indistinct shadow rises, neither wholly elephant nor wholly crocodile. The narrative turns towards its next stage: the outstretched hand.

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Chapter 100 — The Elephant, the Crocodile, and a Child’s Hand

Part 1 · The Main Story

Ba asks for the tale of the elephant and crocodile to be told again. This time the assembly interprets it together. Aruni says, “The one trapped is the elephant. The one holding it is the crocodile.” Meera adds, “The one who hears the trapped being’s name is the hand. Rescue without permission is also a crocodile.” Ananya writes the heading “The Elephant, the Crocodile, and a Child’s Hand” in the register. One by one, everyone’s story is placed within the image. For Ujjwal’s mother, the elephant is Ujjwal and the crocodile is the digital network. For Aruni, the real crocodile is “paper,” which turns labourers into numbers: “A crocodile is not only a jaw; it can also be language.” For Meera, it is “the eye of society that wants to

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Chapter 100 — The Elephant, the Crocodile, and a Child’s Hand

see but refuses to grant respect.” Budhba’s ghost raises a new question: “An elephant is trapped inside the criminals too, but will they name their own crocodile before seeking release?” When they are put to this test, Batuknath first recites his titles, posts and lineage, and at last can say only “Batuk.” Chandrapal says “commission” before he says “Chandrapal,” but the wave breaks as soon as “pal” is heard. Ananya writes, “Speaking a name is not enough; the debt owed to the name still has to be heard.” Raghav tries to cross the kabaddi line, but cannot hold his breath long enough to say “kabaddi.” Lau Kin-hung’s elephant “wants to escape by leaving Earth.” Ba foretells, “This time the elephant and crocodile will go beyond Earth

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Chapter 100 — The Elephant, the Crocodile, and a Child’s Hand

… Whoever fears names on Earth seeks a nameless sky, but the watch over names can reach even there.” At the climax Ananya herself crosses the kabaddi line and faces an abstract “crocodile shadow.” The shadow asks, “Will you save me?” Ananya replies, “First speak your name.” She does not seize it, but waits. The voice of an elephant answers, “Present.” This is not rescue but the first touch of justice. By morning two new leaves have sprouted from the stump’s green point, and a star in the sky seems to bend slightly downwards. The signs indicate that the story will extend beyond the village, bridge and courtroom towards the nameless planet and the heavens. Here Part 1 ends.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part 2 · The Main Story

01 A Water Burial Among the Crocodiles

Chapter 101 — A Dream Invitation from an Unnamed Planet

Part 2 · The Main Story

After the tale of the elephant and the crocodile, Aruni falls asleep beside the stump while watching an advertisement on a screen: “New Horizon Human Habitation: A New Beginning Without Sorrow.” In his dream he sees a white planet without memory. Every house bears a number instead of a name, and its inhabitants are happy because they remember none of their losses. Aruni realizes: “Forgetting, too, is violence: as soon as pain is forgotten, the wrongdoer is released from the account of his deeds.” Ba’s voice enters the dream: “How will you lay your hand on the head of someone who has no name?” Meera protests when she sees “cultural memory specimen” written on a dome wall. Lau Kin-hung is delighted by the memoryless marketplace,

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Chapter 101 — A Dream Invitation from an Unnamed Planet

Part 2 · The Main Story

but when he signs a document his own name vanishes. The dream of escape first consumes the wrongdoer’s identity. Aruni understands that this is not a journey of scientific exploration but the criminal network’s next proposition: “In the name of protecting humanity, make its history useless.” Taking his hand, Ananya says, “We shall cross the line, but we shall bring back one name.”

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Chapter 102 — Kabaddi Between Planets in a Dream

Part 2 · The Main Story

Ananya sets the rules for dream-kabaddi: whoever crosses the line must find a forgotten name and return with it; forgetting the name ends the turn. Trembling, she speaks “Ujjwal” and takes the first step. Meera tells the faceless, numbered guard of the dome: “Sorrow is not born from names but from the atrocities committed against those who bear them … This body is mine. Make it evidence, not a spectacle.” Satyavrat Mehta wants to cross, but the boundary does not open when he calls himself an “officer” or a “witness.” It moves only when he admits, “I am the man who saw what was happening and remained silent for too long.” On the odourless soil of the dream, Aruni understands that behind every link in a chain of evidence stands a

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Chapter 102 — Kabaddi Between Planets in a Dream

human name. At the centre of the dome Ananya touches the blank wall and whispers “Present.” The first crack opens, and the smell of Earth’s water enters the dream planet.

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Chapter 103 — Reading Names on the Unnamed Planet of the Dream

Beyond the crack lies an immense hall whose walls display only serial numbers. As Ananya reads names, what emerges behind the numbers is not a face but a relationship: a mother, a child, a wife. Meera reads the names of women subjected to threats and adds, “Their stories must not be told without their consent.” In his dream court Batuknath recognizes the fear beneath his own conduct—the fear of losing honour—as a root of wrongdoing. Chandrapal remembers the humiliation of his childhood, yet realizes that he himself reduced thousands of people’s names to percentages. Raghav again hears the voices he had erased. Lau Kin-hung says, “Names obstruct the market.” Ananya replies, “Yes, because names demand an accounting,” and wet stains

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Chapter 103 — Reading Names on the Unnamed Planet of the Dream

spread across Lau’s spotless ledger. Aruni writes “Those whose names have not yet been found” on a blank line; the largest serial number on the wall shatters. After the reading of names, the planet loses its polished radiance and grey earth becomes visible.

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Chapter 104 — Awakening: Garh Narikel Chooses Earth

In the morning Ananya, Meera, Satyavrat and the children wake with memories of the same dream. Ba says, “The body need not travel for one to go a great distance, but after waking one must set foot on Earth.” Investigating the advertisement, Aruni discovers that “New Horizon” is no real planetary settlement scheme. It is a publicity experiment run by the criminal network—Broom, Lau, Chandrapal and Raghav together—to measure people’s fear and desire to escape. The children record their decision: “We shall not erase sorrow; we shall change what causes sorrow ... We shall not leave Earth and thereby make crime innocent.” Batuknath, Chandrapal and Raghav are sentenced to the labour of restoring names—opening files, reconciling

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Chapter 104 — Awakening: Garh Narikel Chooses Earth

accounts and listening to voices—rather than handed certificates of forgiveness. Beneath the stump's new shoot Ananya writes, "We choose Earth, for here we have to answer for our deeds." These four short chapters open Part 2 as a bridge of dreams immediately following the elephant-and-crocodile tale.

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Chapter 105 — The First Watch over Earth

After waking from the dream, Ananya touches the stump’s bark and finds the dream’s “blue dust” still on her hand. The moment it touches the soil, however, it dissolves: “Dust without a name cannot remain on Earth.” Ujjwal’s spirit appears as a trembling light on the surface of the water. City newspapers dismiss the village’s experiences as “rural superstition,” but the villagers are unmoved; Gangesha’s question is still alive. Ba announces: “Whoever chooses Earth chooses its dead, its crimes, its shame, its language, its rivers and its failures—all of them.” Satyavrat adds a new line to his affidavit: “There is no liberation by leaving Earth.” Batuknath receives the task of finding names buried in old files: his punishment is

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Chapter 105 — The First Watch over Earth

labour, not humiliation. When Chandrapal Batra says, “I do not know how to write,” Ananya replies, “Then listen.” Under Raghav’s final leaf-message the children write: “The first proof that the soul has opened: see those whom you made invisible.” The sound of names being read continues every night in Lau Kin-hung’s glass tower. Around the new shoot the children devise another form of kabaddi: one breath for the earth, one for water, one for a name and one for the unnamed. A child who loses must listen to someone’s name as a consequence; losing does not mean sitting silently. The stones beside the stump begin to ring of their own accord, and Ba says, “Earth is accepting the watch.” Satyavrat agrees to sit behind the children;

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Chapter 105 — The First Watch over Earth

“sitting at the back and listening” becomes his new office. At the close, they write the first formal pledge of the watch: “We shall not abandon Earth; we shall save it. Whoever’s name is erased, we shall write that name again ...” The only way a story survives, they conclude, is to pass it into the next voice.

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Chapter 106 — The Testimony of Seeds

Ba declares, “We have kept watch over names; now let us keep watch over seeds. If the seed is devoured, from where will words be born in the mouths of the next generation?” Rice, sesame, finger millet, makhana and mango stones are set out in the school, and every seed is asked for its story: who preserved it, in which season, and with which song. Devika warns that supporters of the “unnamed planet” are preparing to steal seeds as well. Ira tells children overseas, “A seed is not merely a picture ... If you save a photograph but do not know the farmer’s name, you are in love with an object.” Budhba’s ghost says, “Seeds do not ask about caste ... Human beings built bamboo fences inside their own heads.” Women bring old tins of

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Chapter 106 — The Testimony of Seeds

seeds inherited from mothers-in-law or rescued from famine. Meera respects the “privacy of seeds” and does not demand that every family story be made public. A government jeep arrives with a proposal to collect seeds, identified by numbers rather than names, for an “Improved Seed Collection and Climate Security Project.” In the paperwork Gop Kumar recognizes a signature resembling the one on Broom’s old deed of donation: “This is not a list for conservation; it is a list for acquisition.” Ba smells the paper and says, “This carries the smell of a vault, not of earth.” After the jeep leaves, a fine white line resembling the dream’s unnamed planet appears on the stump’s shoot. The New Horizon project wants seed data. At midnight a

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Chapter 106 — The Testimony of Seeds

low chorus rises from the seed containers: “We want soil, not serial numbers.” In the morning Ananya opens a new register page entitled “The Theft of Seeds.” The watch has expanded from names to seeds.

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Chapter 107 — The Theft of Seeds

The village places containers of rice, finger millet, kodo millet and medicinal seeds under guard beside the stump, each labelled with a name. Surmani Kaki brings a brass box of rice called “Submerged Breath”: “This rice survives three days under floodwater; a name, too, can drown and return.” At midday officials, consultants and a foreign researcher arrive carrying papers for an “Indigenous Seed Conservation and Interplanetary Adaptation Study.” Gop Kumar reads the small print: “For use in adaptation to extraterrestrial habitation projects.” Ananya immediately connects it to New Horizon. Meera reads the clause on “anonymization”: the seeds will be stripped of their village, caste and women’s labour and assigned numbers instead.

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Chapter 107 — The Theft of Seeds

Ba asks sharply, “First you took the land, then the water, then the names, and now the seeds. Next time will you acquire the womb as well?” The children draw a kabaddi line around the containers. Hearing Surmani Kaki say, “Gene or genie, first understand that this is my mother,” the foreign researcher bursts into tears and refuses to take a sample. It is the project’s first internal fracture. Satyavrat Mehta says, “Here the governing section is the Kamala-Balan river; ask which section applies, and the water will answer.” In the evening the village adopts a “testimony of seeds” rule: no seed may leave without its full name and the story of its home and field. At night a faint voice from the containers asks, “Where shall we grow?”

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Chapter 107 — The Theft of Seeds

Part 2 · The Main Story

Ananya opens a page headed “The Mouth of the Soil.” The theft has been prevented, but the seeds still need a place in which to grow.

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Chapter 108 — The Mouth of the Soil

Part 2 · The Main Story

The village sets about answering the seeds' question: "Where shall we grow?" Ananya writes "Fourth Watch: The Mouth of the Soil" in the register. The fields are called by their names—Bargadahi, the edge of the Musahari settlement, Ujjar Dih. Harihar Jha proposes his "pure" field, never tilled by the people of the leatherworkers' or Dusadh settlements. Surmani Kaki challenges him at once: "When someone eats food in hunger, how does the soil become impure because of the hand that grew it?" Gangesha's question returns. Dhirmati, a girl from the leatherworkers' settlement, proposes the neglected fallow land behind her house: "Where the soil carries the smell of human labour, it lives." The villagers decide to test the seeds in five

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Chapter 108 — The Mouth of the Soil

soils: the soil of suffering in the leatherworkers’ settlement; of water in the Musahari; of endurance in the widows’ garden; of labour in the sharecropped field; and of memory beside the stump. Surmani Kaki sets the first grain in Dhirmati’s palm: “Seeds read the lines of the earth, not caste.” While clearing the land, Devika warns, “Do not erase the history of the fallow ground in the name of cleaning it.” Dhirmati keeps a fragment of her father’s shoe. Before sowing, every bed receives a spoken name, among them “flood-enduring rice” and “light from hands called impure.” Seeds are planted in the other four beds in the same manner. The workers say, “Half the rice, all the debt.” Five different groups of children keep watch over

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Chapter 108 — The Mouth of the Soil

the beds at night. At midnight the soil answers softly, “I heard.” By morning, nails, red markings and measuring-tape signs appear along the boundaries. Ananya writes, “The seeds have found where to grow, but now the crocodile of ownership has reached the field’s edge.” The next dispute concerns title to the land.

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Chapter 109 — The Memory of Water

Rain has made little pools around the stump, and names seem to float on their surfaces. Putting her ear close, Ananya hears the water whisper, “I could not keep their bodies, but I kept their last touch.” She opens a page headed “The Memory of Water.” Panidubbi arrives and tells her, “Soil holds a name; water holds its movement. Write the paths in the water.” The children draw a map on the ground: a round ripple for missing workers, a dried well for the lack of medicines, a small screen for digital fraud. Ira proposes a “map of smells”; women bring water from courtyards, wells and hospitals and identify the different places by scent. At Panidubbi’s request Satyavrat Mehta puts his hand in the water, and letters like “silence,”

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Chapter 109 — The Memory of Water

“delay” and “witness” appear on his fingers. A new kabaddi is played around water: pick up a name and return without breaking the breath. Ujjwal’s spirit flickers in the water and tells a child, “My mother’s crying reached the water; write it down.” Aruni extends Gangesha’s four means of proof to water: “There will be justice when we accept as evidence even the silence of those who drowned.” An elderly leatherworker brings a vessel of water: “The names of our forebears were never read in this grove.” Ba declares, “Now justice has begun.” By evening the pools join to form a circle. At the end a commercial vehicle arrives advertising “Sacred Memory Water: Bottled Reverence.” The market is preparing to sell memory as bottled water.

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Chapter 109 — The Memory of Water

Satyavrat warns that whenever memory begins to be sold as water, the watch must grow stricter.

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Chapter 110 — The Witness of Fire

On the night of the fifth watch, smoke rises from the paper store beside the stump, where copies of records, tenders and donation deeds are kept. Someone is trying to break the watch over names by burning documents in the dark. Rather than scream, the children call out, “Present.” Meera says the flames must not be extinguished so thoroughly that their traces vanish: “If we put out everything, how will we find evidence of what burned?” The burning papers expose a truth previously concealed. Behind the description “encroached vacant land” appear the words “valuation of land in the memorial area.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “A hand that burns a document meant to preserve people’s names writes its own testimony.” Gop Kumar discovers that

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Chapter 110 — The Witness of Fire

the lock was opened with a key; of three people who held keys, archive attendant Hemnarayan is missing. He is found unconscious beside the pond and admits lending his key in return for a promise to cancel his son's hospital debt; he says he was not told the papers would be burned. Ba determines his punishment: a month of night watches over names, rewriting the half-burned names, and a public hearing about the debt. On a scorched sheet only "Sar...," "Uj..." and "Na..." remain. Ujjwal's mother says, "Do not treat the half-burned name as incomplete; let it stand for the names of all the unnamed." Saumya finds a fragment marked with the company symbols of Broom and Chandrapal in the ashes. Budhba's ghost draws two circles in the

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Chapter 110 — The Witness of Fire

ash, for the village and Earth, but not yet a third for the unnamed planet. A child asks, “Fire has spoken, water has spoken, soil has spoken. When will air speak?” The wind blows ash onto the children’s foreheads. Ananya opens a new page: “Seventh Watch: The Testimony of Air.”

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Chapter 111 — The Question of Air

Smoke from the fire drifts through the village lanes, stirring different memories in different people. Ananya opens “Seventh Watch: The Question of Air” and asks how one can guard what cannot be seen. The children set rules: do not spread an unverified claim, repeat an anonymous accusation, or release a woman’s story into the air without her consent. A rumour naming someone falsely begins at a tea stall, but investigation reveals no source: “Rumours have wings, not roots.” The wind enters Batuknath’s house and blows dust across the paper on which he has written “Forgive me,” revealing “Listen first.” In Chandrapal’s office dust settles on a screen to form “Names are not to be filtered.” Raghav Signal hears old signals whisper in

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Chapter 111 — The Question of Air

his ear: “Silence, too, is a broadcast.” Even in Lau Kin-hung’s purified-air room, “Present” appears on the glass. In the evening the children plant flags around the stump bearing the words truth, name, privacy, labour, water, soil, seed, fire and air. In a new game of kabaddi, breathing itself becomes ethical evidence. A boy once caught entering false names in Chandrapal’s app admits during play, “I entered a lie”; the children say, “A breath that confesses does not break.” At night they ask what air would be like on the unnamed planet of the dream. Ira replies, “If we cannot save names in Earth’s air, even breathing on the dream planet will be rented out.” The air itself ends by asking, “Who will guard what you call breath?” A

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Chapter 111 — The Question of Air

small crack appears far away in the dome advertising New Horizon.

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Chapter 112 — The Emptiness of the Sky

Part 2 · The Main Story

After air has asked its question, no further element speaks. Instead, the sky opens out. With the tree gone, the entire sky can be seen at once, and its immensity presses as a new weight upon the chest. Ananya understands the sky as “the greatest vessel for listening.” Satyavrat says, “Paper stays on the ground; today the question is coming from above.” The children ask what mark the sky leaves. “Its mark is empty space,” Ananya says, “where a name has not been written but can still be heard.” Budhba’s ghost distinguishes two kinds of emptiness: “An emptiness made by power devours. An emptiness made by memory gives room.” Under a new custom, after each name is read everyone silently looks upwards. Chandrapal’s screen displays,

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Chapter 112 — The Emptiness of the Sky

Part 2 · The Main Story

“What has risen cannot be downloaded.” Raghav tries to send a message to the sky, but no “delivered” sign appears. The sky over Mithila appears on the glass of Lau Kin-hung’s room: “The sky here is not mine.” Stains begin to form on the artificial blue ceiling of the unnamed dream planet. At dusk kabaddi is played with the line drawn in the sky and a child’s shadow running there instead of on the ground. Being caught is no longer defeat but a question. Meera connects the open space with the place denied to women’s suppressed stories inside the home; at night women whisper unspoken names towards the heavens. Ira writes to children abroad: “Soil, water, fire, air and sky are the five steps of memory.” At the end, an entire sky

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Chapter 112 — The Emptiness of the Sky

seems to enter a drop of dew. A faint beat of a drum rises from within the earth. Ba says, “The sky has heard; now the world beneath will answer.” The roots tremble, hinting at the next invitation from below.

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Chapter 113 — The Body of a Word

After the sky’s emptiness, names themselves begin to ask, “Where is my body?” Ananya explains: “A false word quickly acquires a body—a file, seal, contract—but when a true word has not become action, its body remains incomplete.” At school a gathering of letters considers five words—name, present, justice, privacy and Earth—and asks what body each possesses. Gop Kumar points to disembodied bureaucratic words in his old files, including “beneficiary” and “grant.” Satyavrat says, “If there is no compassion in the body of a word, it is like a corpse.” Ira places a seed before “Earth”: “The body of the word Earth is not merely a round planet; it is the feet that carry a burden.” Meera places a mirror before “privacy”; Devika, the

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Chapter 113 — The Body of a Word

shape of an ear before “present,” explaining that being present means giving time to listen; and Aruni, a tulsi leaf before “justice.” Touching the stone before “name,” Satyavrat says, “If a name written on a stone never returns to anyone’s lips, the stone remains a monument, not a life.” The children adopt the rule, “No word is to be accepted without a body”: development, people’s memory, tribute and forgiveness must all show what they mean in practice. At night they run in kabaddi carrying word-names. A mysterious beam, perhaps from New Horizon or a government office, then projects the word “contract” in the empty ring, shining without a body. Budhba’s ghost warns, “Look for the contract’s body. If you find no body, you will

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Chapter 113 — The Body of a Word

find its stomach.” They resolve to examine not just the paper but the bones, land and water upon which such a contract is written.

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Chapter 114 — The Soul of Meaning

The following morning, flags for an official or heritage-sponsored “Present Campaign” appear in the marketplace. The children’s sacred word “present” is now printed on banners, caps and bags. “The body may remain the same while its soul changes,” Ananya says. Connecting this to Gangesha’s study of evidence, Budhba’s ghost observes that a word is not a fixed root but a relationship. The children compare “present” in three circles: tears in a bereaved household, accounting in a government campaign, and vacancy on the dream planet. On a municipal cap the felled stump has been replaced by a fully green grove, concealing the wound; an official calls this a “positive image.” Meera protests, “Privacy was sold in the name of security;

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Chapter 114 — The Soul of Meaning

now memory is being polished and called heritage. This is theft of meaning.” In the evening the villagers test the meanings of development, donation, justice, respect, security and heritage. Satyavrat admits, “Often there was service to the word, not to its meaning … When justice devours years, the word remains but its meaning dies.” A descendant of Batuknath asks what “dignity” means. Meera answers, “Ask those who were silenced in its name.” At the end a damp official leaflet appears, proposing to reinterpret “water burial” as “water heritage,” “the dead” as “fragments of the past,” and “victims” as “stakeholders.” Ananya opens a page called “The Court of Reinterpretation.” Satyavrat declares, “When wrongdoers change words,

Chapter 114 — The Soul of Meaning

justice has to guard language.” Letters detach from the flags and fall beside the stump, where the children collect them. The next struggle will take place within meaning itself.

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Chapter 115 — The Watch over Voices

After defending the soul of meaning, the villagers find a new machine beside the meeting ground: a “Voice Archive of Names.” Its operators, calling themselves “Hearing Guardians,” want to record the reading of names. Small print on their form states that the organizing institution will own the sound rights. Ananya asks, “The name belongs to its bearer and the voice to its speaker. Who, then, owns the right to it?” Batuknath, Chandrapal and Raghav each see an opportunity in the device: a trust, donations and code. When the reading begins, Ujjwal’s mother says softly, “If the box can listen quietly, let it listen; if not, the box is deaf.” An old man speaks a name in a cracked voice and refuses a request to repeat it clearly: “I

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Chapter 115 — The Watch over Voices

will not correct my dead for a machine.” A boy tries to say his grandfather’s name and begins to weep. The machine cannot record grief as understanding; its red light merely blinks. Chandrapal whispers, “Emotional audio is valuable; preserve it,” and Devika catches the implication: “Even tears are becoming valuable merchandise.” Meera announces, “No throat will be imprisoned without consent.” Satyavrat adds that private or institutional ownership of collective suffering is unjust. Ba says, “The box listens, but its stomach does not hurt.” The children write the rules of the “watch over voices”: without consent from the name’s family, no sound may be taken; listen first, archive later. They send the machine away, calling it “the

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Chapter 115 — The Watch over Voices

ear of greed.” At night names are read without equipment, the broken voices gathering in a rhythm like collective kabaddi. Even the crocodiles seem to pause in the water to listen. Then a new title shines of its own accord in the register: “Writing,” signalling danger to language and print.

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Chapter 116 — The Inheritance of Silence

The children begin a lesson in silence. Devika sets out an empty bowl, and Ba says, “Today first read the word that was never spoken.” Satyavrat distinguishes two kinds of silence: “When I could speak but did not, my silence was a crime. When the injured person does not want to speak, silence is that person’s right.” A “voice collection troupe” comes from the city offering to preserve the oral heritage of name-reading, but a concealed condition on its form permits “enhanced presentation.” Meera asks, “If preservation separates the voice from its body, is that not theft?” Chandrapal and Raghav again glimpse profits in the trade in voices, but fail; Raghav understands that “a network can carry a voice, not listening.” A new rule is

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Chapter 116 — The Inheritance of Silence

established: “Do not drag a name out of someone who does not wish to speak … Silence, too, can be present.” Ujjwal’s mother offers her silence on a blank sheet. A boy once involved in the procession of fake ghosts brings his sister, who cannot speak. She draws a line on a leaf, turning it into a kabaddi circle, and plays without a sound: breath moves within her, but there is no external voice. The troupe packs away its equipment, saying, “We have seen a court without justice; why is it so difficult to imagine kabaddi without a voice?” At night a “point of silence” appears by itself on the register’s empty page. In Lau Kin-hung’s dream the bright wall bears only an empty circle: “Silence cannot be deposited.” Ananya opens a page

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Chapter 116 — The Inheritance of Silence

headed “Now the Watch over Eyes.” The market of the gaze will next try to sell faces.

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Chapter 117 — The Debt of Memory

The children write on the school wall, “Who will carry the debt of a name that has been heard?” Ananya explains that this debt is repaid not with money but through the way one lives. Ira gives each child the task of bringing from home one name that has gone unhonoured or unspoken. One boy returns with only “leatherworker woman.” His elders do not know the full name of Gangesha Upadhyaya’s life companion; they told him only, “Read the Tattvachintamani, leave the story alone.” Ananya writes, “Whom does the absence of evidence protect?” Ba says, “A society that accepts Gangesha’s intelligence but cuts away the inconvenient truth of his life kills half of him.” Meera deliberately leaves an empty space beside “leatherworker woman.”

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Chapter 117 — The Debt of Memory

Part 2 · The Main Story 2 / 3

Satyavrat writes, “Shame about caste: murder of memory.” Gop Kumar finds accounts in which the wrong side has been entered as debtor, while those who plundered are not recorded as owing anything. A new rule links each name heard to an action: honour labour in a worker’s name, teach care with screens in the name of a young fraud victim. “A name without action is stone; action without a name is air.” In the afternoon a letter offers a “Memory Debt Release Scheme”: the government, Broom’s institution and Batuknath’s trust propose an honour payment in exchange for ending independent readings of names. Ananya asks, “Have they come to release us from the debt, or to become its owners?” When an elder objects in the name of propriety, a

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Chapter 117 — The Debt of Memory

child responds, “If propriety devours names, it is no better than a crocodile.” At night new kabaddi lines run from each stone to a player’s feet; before returning the player must name an action. Budhba’s ghost laughs: “One who returns carrying a debt keeps a story alive.” At midnight the scheme letter turns damp and its seal to smoke. Only three words remain: “Whose liberation?” Ananya opens the next page: “Tomorrow, the Question of Release from Debt.”

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Chapter 118 — The Right to the Body

Representatives of the heritage project arrive with an inventory of “collectible objects”: soil from Channa Grove’s roots, bone-like fragments, women’s recollections and more. Pressing down one corner of the paper, Meera says, “Those whose bodies are gone did not leave their remains for your exhibition.” When Broom’s representative invokes “preservation,” Devika replies, “To lock suffering in glass and sell tickets is not preservation. It is a second devouring.” Aruni observes that the inventory says nothing about labourers’ families granting permission or about dignity. A lesson entitled “The Right to the Body” begins at the school. Ananya explains that anyone who touches photographs, clothes or bones without consent is not a

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Chapter 118 — The Right to the Body

guardian but a thief. Meera returns to Gangesha’s story: a thinker whose ideas could shatter the cage of caste was placed upon a high scholarly pedestal so that the story of his embodied life could be buried beneath it. When a documentation team goes to the leatherworkers’ settlement, an elderly woman stops them: “Write down our caste if you must, but who gave you permission to earn money from our humiliation?” The camera is lowered. Five rules form a code for the body: the living person has first claim over their body; the dead must be treated through family, community and dignity; humiliation in the name of caste is an offence against memory; research, art and philanthropy cannot claim a body without consent; and silence must

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Chapter 118 — The Right to the Body

be respected. Satyavrat writes, “If justice does not begin with the body, justice remains a game of words.” In the evening, families inspect the soil and cloth designated for a museum in the sunlight, then take them home. Bone-like grains are honoured through the speaking of names. Crocodiles dive after making a long circle in the water. Ba says, “They devoured bodies, but could not devour the dignity of a body.” At night an old caste register in the revenue office opens on its own and asks, “Who will certify lineage?” The struggle over caste documents is approaching.

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Chapter 119 — The Body of Labour

A “watch over labour” begins in the school. Aruni Nandan lays out a torn shoe, a fingernail embedded in cement, and a wage slip bearing only a number. “A number is put where the employer is afraid of a name,” he says. The wife of Jhagaru Mistri, who fell into the river while casting a bridge pier, arrives with a grievance: “The hands that tended the hearth in my house were recorded by the company as not even being at work.” The accident report said “absent from duty.” Gop Kumar’s old copy records only “men 47, women 9.” Meera asks, “If you can record gender, why not names?” Looking at the workers’ hands, Satyavrat writes, “Testimony of the body of labour.” Bhagelu Paswan says bridges unite people while workers who built them were

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Chapter 119 — The Body of Labour

seated apart because of caste: “The body was mine, the contract someone else’s; the death was mine, the insurance someone else’s.” Gangesha’s question rises again: “By what evidence shall we know justice—scripture, or a thirsty worker’s throat?” An engineer from the heritage project offers employment to local workers, but falls silent when asked for named contracts, punctual wages and medical entitlements. Satyavrat says, “If we set out to save the names of the dead and again leave the bodies of living workers anonymous, it will be another crime, not a memorial.” A new rule is adopted: “The name before the work begins.” Workers’ names, villages, wages and safety provisions must be kept in an open record. During the evening

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Chapter 119 — The Body of Labour

reading, a form of labour is spoken with each name—“the one who cast the pier,” “the one who carried the body home.” The children wash workers’ feet with water: “Not worship, but respect for weariness.” On an empty stone they write, “The one who works but remains unseen,” anticipating a lesson on invisible labour.

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Chapter 120 — The Body of Justice

Part 2 · The Main Story

After guarding labour, the children realize that justice still has no body: it exists only in paper, seals and dates. The coconut-leaf school opens a page entitled “The Body of Justice.” An elderly woman labourer says, “Justice that arrives smelling of perfume often comes to conceal a rotting body. Real justice is incomplete without the smells of sweat, ash, mud, milk, blood and tears.” Aruni spreads out an old bridge plan and invites workers’ families to run their hands across it. The drawing becomes “not a road but a journey of bodies.” Gop Kumar closes the file: “Data is only the skeleton; people make the body around it.” A village potter mixes soil from five places—the bank of the Kamala, the bridge pier, the hollow of the

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Chapter 120 — The Body of Justice

stump, a white courtyard and Panidubbi's pond—to shape a "body of justice." "Not an idol," the potter insists, "but a body: an idol asks for worship; a body demands accountability." Women labourers impress their palms in the clay, and Aruni presses in his trembling hand. On Ba's instructions Satyavrat places his ear against the earth: "The impression of silence is not made with a hand; put an ear to the soil." Thus ears for listening are added to justice. Meera and Devika prevent the media from filming: "This is not a spectacle for consumption." By evening the clay body has an ear resting on earth, one hand turned towards water, and an empty chest: "Justice's breast must be an open home, not a permanent decoration." Broom's

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Chapter 120 — The Body of Justice

representative, Chandrapal with his digital-clay-statue app, and Raghav, whose message changes into “put your ear here,” all try and fail to commercialize the image. At midnight, when a stone marked “Name Not Found” is set against the clay chest, a fine crack appears. The potter says, “The crack is not a defect. If justice had no cracks, how would the voices inside escape?” The body of justice can weep. By morning the stump’s new shoot casts a shadow over its open chest. Ananya starts a new page, “Seventeenth Watch: The Law of the Shadow.”

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Chapter 121 — The Cage of Caste

Once the body of justice has been made, the old caste order confronts the village again. An elderly Brahmin arrives with a copperplate, genealogies and manuscripts: “The dignity of a lineage counts for something.” Gangesha’s question returns, stopping the old man in mid-speech. Ira asks, “Why does society take pride in a thinker’s intelligence but remain silent about the uncomfortable truths of his life?” Batuknath says biographical matters are controversial and a great book should not be dragged into private affairs. Meera answers sharply: “When society judges a woman’s body, it makes private life public; when the caste-breaking life of a scholar is questioned, it suddenly calls it private and demands silence?” An impression of

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Chapter 121 — The Cage of Caste

a shoe appears in the soil around the stump: “The foot of the leatherworker woman.” The unheard voice of that woman, a figure of historical exclusion, rises: “Those who said my touch defiled them wore shoes made by my labour to go on pilgrimage … Tell me, who needs proof?” The names of Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha “Ashok” recur: killing the truth of a life in the name of honour is itself an offence of caste. Aruni asks why justice, which can reach the bridge pier, workers’ feet and women’s bodies, should stop at the doorway of caste. A young labourer and the old Brahmin place their hands upon the soil, which dries the same colour in both palms. Ba says, “The body of the grove gives its dust the same colour for everyone.

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Chapter 121 — The Cage of Caste

Caste is made by human beings, not by earth.” At night the children write: “Listen to a name before asking caste; look at labour before speaking of purity.” Batuknath secretly writes, “The matter concerning Gangesha should be kept within limits.” By morning the word “touch” has sprung up between the letters of his note.

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Chapter 122 — The Liberation of Gangesha

Part 2 · The Main Story

1 / 3

On the morning after the cage of caste is exposed, black dust from the stump forms the word “evidence.” Ba simply says, “Gangesha has come.” In a drop of water on the stump a mirror-scene opens, showing a pregnant woman and the claim that a child was “born five years after his father’s death.” Satyavrat stops Gop Kumar: “Here evidence does not mean files alone. It means people’s memory, questions and concealed fear as well.” Ananya draws four circles—perception, inference, verbal testimony, and a new fourth, “suppressed life.” In the mirror appears the leatherworker woman. Meera asks, “Why did no one record the real name of the woman identified in history only by her caste?” Her voice comes to stand for many forms of women’s

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Chapter 122 — The Liberation of Gangesha

humiliation. The names of Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha “Ashok” surface again; Ba calls their editorial suppression an “honour killing”—committed not with a metal blade but the knife of a pen. When Batuknath Hariharan demands historical evidence, Ananya replies, “How many injured voices have you stopped in the name of evidence?” Satyavrat declares, “If a caste watchman sits at the door to evidence, truth is killed before it enters.” The children write, “Perception without compassion is darkness; testimony without responsibility is violence.” The shadow of the leatherworker woman stands beside Gangesha as an equal, not as his subordinate. Lau, Broom and Chandrapal try to control or commercialize the event in different ways, but

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Chapter 122 — The Liberation of Gangesha

the children insist, “Gangesha is not an advertisement. He is a question.” Four stones are set down at dusk: Gangesha; the leatherworker woman, whose name is awaited; the truth of a life cut away in honour’s name; and the Tattvachintamani, the fire of questioning. During nighttime kabaddi the chant “kabaddi, kabaddi” is joined by “evidence, evidence.” A bright, impersonal voice issues from the stump: “One who fears questions is not fit to administer justice.” Ananya opens “Nineteenth Watch: The Crack in Evidence.” The next answer will come from the courtyard of the house considered lowest in the village.

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Chapter 123 — The Leaf of the Tattvachintamani

After Gangesha’s liberation, the children sit in the shade of the stump’s new shoot. Ananya says, “Gangesha Baba has been liberated, but the watch over his book remains.” Ba adds, “A book that cannot teach one to see a human being is worth less than half a leaf, let alone twelve thousand books.” Invisible lines appear on a leaf of the new growth and can be read only through questions. The children devise a game involving Gangesha’s four categories of evidence: perception, inference, testimony and, hardest of all, non-apprehension. A child asks, “Is caste perceptible?” Meera replies, “The pride of caste is not directly perceived; its violence is.” When a priest’s grandson declares scriptural words superior to everything, Ba

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Chapter 123 — The Leaf of the Tattvachintamani

responds, “A word that declares a human being low is no word; it is power.” In the circle of non-apprehension Ananya says, “We do not know the full name of the leatherworker woman in Gangesha’s life. That absence is itself non-apprehension … Gangesha cannot be fully liberated without looking for the unknown woman’s name.” The leaf grows, and the number of leaves refuses to stay fixed when counted. Ba says that the comparison with twelve thousand books does not refer to the weight of pages but to endless questions. Two scholars from a “Gangesha Study Council” arrive from the city proposing a “controlled presentation” and “scientific edition.” Ananya asks, “We need evidence—but who guards the gate to evidence?” A leaf falls onto

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Chapter 123 — The Leaf of the Tattvachintamani

their papers and blurs the printed lines. Satyavrat says, “Justice is also the question of who may ask questions.” A new rule is proclaimed: “No scripture stands above a human body. No philosophy is complete without the name of the woman history pushed aside.” The leaves move and form a sentence on the soil: “The question of the erased remains.” From the roots comes what may be the voice of the still unnamed leatherworker woman: “Justice remains incomplete until a question acquires a body.”

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Chapter 124 — The Fire of Evidence

The letters on the Tattvachintamani leaf change when touched: “evidence” becomes “whose evidence?” and “justice” becomes “whose justice?” Ba touches the leaf and produces light rather than fire. This time Satyavrat sits among the others: “I have listened to law; now let me listen to evidence.” The story of Gangesha’s life returns. Ira asks, “You preserved the ideas but removed the marriage; kept the arguments but retained the fear of caste. What kind of justice is that?” Meera distinguishes “killing in the name of honour”: the killing of a body and the killing of memory are different acts. On the leaf appear the shadows of Ramanath Jha and Udaychandra Jha “Ashok”: one hand cuts an inconvenient line from a life, while the other

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Chapter 124 — The Fire of Evidence

hangs a garland upon a book. Ananya asks, “Did you kill Gangesha?” They reply, “We made him immortal.” “Whom did you make immortal,” she asks, “him, or the comforting idol of your own caste?” Satyavrat writes in his notebook: “Evidence is not only written text; it includes oral memory, suppressed lives and lines cut from the record.” A child asks for the leatherworker woman’s name; everyone is silent. A new stone is placed: “Leatherworker woman—name being sought.” Panidubbi says from the water, “Caste does not endure in water,” and Ba asks what remains of a body’s caste in a water burial. Gangesha’s shadow takes clearer shape: “That empty space was the brightest of all ... If you read my account of justice, why did you hide the

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Chapter 124 — The Fire of Evidence

injustice of my life?” Ananya announces the lesson, “Stay longer where a life is inconvenient.” The leaves gather into a ring around the absence of the leatherworker woman: the “Fire of Evidence.” The children write, “Gangesha’s liberation will come not from a book but from accepting an entire life.” Ananya opens a new page, “The Leatherworker Woman’s Name,” turning the story towards the search for that woman.

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Chapter 125 — Rice of Judgment

Part 2 · The Main Story

1 / 3

After the ashes of the fire of evidence have cooled, Ananya asks, “When evidence has burned, what happens to judgment?” Aruni proposes drawing a line across a field with ash: “If justice grows no grain, it is only the ashes of words.” Ba brings rice seed: “This will go into a field from which many feet were kept away in the name of caste.” Everyone goes to the field of a leatherworking family that was once denied a seat at the public assembly. An elderly leatherworker woman sits on the embankment, and Meera says, “The soil speaks through your palms, and therefore so shall you.” Gangesha’s story is retold with attention to the name of the embodied person. Satyavrat admits, “A verdict that produces no food and no equal place to sit

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Chapter 125 — Rice of Judgment

is not justice; it is the language of administration.” As she scatters ash on the field, Ananya says, “This is ash not only of evidence but of what has been denied as evidence—everything removed from memory in honour’s name.” The unnamed leatherworker woman is recorded not merely as a “wife” but as “co-evidence.” Ba says, “A scripture that cuts away a woman’s name leaves its page incomplete.” With trembling hands Satyavrat scatters rice upon the ash. The villagers draw a line across an old caste boundary. Holding her breath, Ananya crosses it and returns carrying seeds received from the elderly woman: “Turn a boundary that stops justice into a game.” Budhba’s ghost laughs in the sunshine: “Every wall still has a game of kabaddi

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Chapter 125 — Rice of Judgment

left in it.” A boy asks whether scholars who remove uncomfortable truth to build an idol commit murder. Ira answers, “The body is killed once; memory is murdered again and again.” At dusk everyone takes a turn guiding the plough: first the elderly leatherworker woman, then Aruni, Meera, Satyavrat and Ananya, breaking the caste division of agricultural work. Ba says, “An ear of rice is heavier than justice. If it bends, we shall know the judgment bore fruit.” The register records, “Today justice entered the field,” with the promise that its final judgment will be made at harvest.

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Chapter 126 — Justice in Grain

Ba says, “Justice that has not become rice is only a sentence.” The school’s lesson moves into the field. Gangesha’s modes of evidence—perception, inference, testimony, comparison, postulation and non-apprehension—are explained in the language of daily life and food. Village women bring old measures and weights and ask, “There is a register of names, but where is the register of hunger?” Devika opens a “Roll of Hunger.” Ananya explains the difference between charity and entitlement: “Pity is rice thrown down from above; a share is rice eaten while seated together.” Batuknath proposes a grain fund belonging to the People’s Memory Trust, with donors’ names carved on a plaque. The villagers refuse: “First write the names of those

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Chapter 126 — Justice in Grain

who grew and harvested it, not the giver.” Chandrapal’s “digital grain pass” and Lau Kin-hung’s imported seeds are also rejected. Ira asks, “When memory is gone, who owns what remains?” The women draw up rules for a communal storehouse: the recipient of food must be called a “member,” not a “poor person.” At dusk the children play kabaddi chanting, “Not hunger, a share.” The first grain is deposited at night. An elderly priest raises caste objections. Ananya asks, “If hunger has one caste, how many castes does rice have?” Ba feeds him a grain; eating it, he weeps and admits, “No purification is greater than hunger.” A child brings a plate that has stood empty at home for years. At midnight it gives off a “sound of hunger,”

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Chapter 126 — Justice in Grain

neither a word nor a sob but the sound of emptiness in a stomach. Satyavrat says, “Until today we wrote the names of the dead. Now we shall write the names of the living who are hungry.” Ananya opens a new page, “The Name of Hunger.” The storehouse is still not full and the plate is still empty, but the body of justice has entered field, grain and plate.

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Chapter 127 — The Name of Hunger

The children sit around the empty plate to write “The Name of Hunger.” This is harder than recording the dead, for hunger is ashamed and hides. Satyavrat’s hand trembles. Ba says, “To name hunger is not to expose a stomach but to expose shame.” The first name is “the hearth’s fast”: three days without the smell of cooked rice. The second is “hunger to preserve Father’s voice”: a herdsman who refuses to sell his cattle. The third is “holiday hunger”: the child who receives a midday meal at school but none on holidays. The fourth is “the stomach held back by fear of lineage”: a family that remains hungry out of caste pride. Ba remarks, “A lineage that silences its daughter in hunger has already vanished.” Gangesha’s memory returns

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Chapter 127 — The Name of Hunger

with the injunction, “Accept evidence in a way that does not make suffering into a lie.” Many names of hunger accumulate throughout the day. Devika asks, “We have written names, but when will there be food?” Satyavrat establishes the rule, “Grain as a right, not charity in a donor’s name.” A merchant’s offer to have his name inscribed on a plaque is refused. Chandrapal and Raghav try to use a digital donation platform and code, but even the language turns against them. At dusk the first communal kitchen fire is lit. Meera makes certain that nobody photographs the faces of those receiving meals. Food is served without distinctions of high or low. An old man who had concealed his poverty begins to weep; his entry becomes “the

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Chapter 127 — The Name of Hunger

stomach that could not speak.” Ba announces, “A storehouse is made to be emptied. A full storehouse beside a hungry village is injustice.” One grain is deliberately left on the empty plate overnight: “We shall never assume hunger has been entirely ended.” The grain rotates towards the north, towards the dry well. Ba says, “After hunger comes thirst,” and a new page opens: “The Watch over Thirst.”

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Chapter 128 — The Name of Thirst

After the names of hunger have been written, a child arrives with an empty water pot and asks, “You have written the name of hunger. Where is the name of thirst?” Ba recalls, “Even water had a caste in my childhood ... A thirsty person could be forbidden to cast a shadow near it.” Ananya writes, “Evidence: Thirst.” The history of an old well outside the village is reopened. Women from the leatherworkers’ settlement were not allowed to draw water there and had to go to a muddy pond far away. Meera says, “There is no right to the body without the right to water. Once people are forbidden to touch, it becomes easy to forbid them to drink.” The children visit the well, where old scratches on its edge are named “the script of thirst.”

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Chapter 128 — The Name of Thirst

One woman’s mother was caught drawing water at night and her pitcher was smashed: “First name of thirst: the silenced throat.” Another boy’s grandfather had to use a separate, caste-marked cup for drinking water at school: “Second name of thirst: the separate cup.” Ira connects these histories with the rationing of water on the unnamed dream planet: “On Earth caste withheld water; on the dream planet capital does.” On Lau Kin-hung’s screen the words “long-term water supply rights” change to “Whose thirst will you sell?” Chandrapal’s app offers “water donations in the name of names,” which Devika calls “a mule account for thirst.” Names are read by the well, and after each testimony the empty pot is struck. Satyavrat asks, “Why

Chapter 128 — The Name of Thirst

does justice arrive so late at water?” By evening the brush around the well has been cleared and the bucket moves again. Ba says, “The first water is muddy, like memory. Keep drawing, and it will become clear.” After thirty buckets the well “breathes.” That night, during a communal water-reading, each person takes a palmful and speaks their name: “I share thirst.” Raghav’s messages turn into the ring of an empty pot—ting, ting, ting. Ananya writes that the watch over thirst will remain incomplete until every well, river, pond, pitcher, cloud and tear on Earth is free.

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Chapter 129 — The Oath of Salt

Ananya opens the page “Twenty-Fifth Watch: The Oath of Salt.” Salt, she says, carries the same taste from a mother’s milk to a labourer’s sweat. Children bring a pinch of salt from each household and set it beside the stump. Ba recalls the salt of her mother’s kitchen. Devika brings the old salt tin from Ujjwal’s home, left on the stove when news of the son’s death arrived. Meera refuses to arrange the salt by caste: “No one will ask salt for its caste.” Ananya asks, “Whoever calls their own salt pure and another’s impure must first explain the taste of their own tears.” An elderly Dalit woman says, “Those who would not drink water in our courtyard ate bread made by our hands. What sort of justice was that?” Satyavrat writes,

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Chapter 129 — The Oath of Salt

Part 2 · The Main Story

“Salt testifies that claims of purity are often theft of labour.” Munna Paswan’s brother speaks of the salt in the sweat of the worker who fell from the bridge: “Everyone crossing the bridge walks upon his salt.” A merchant proposes selling “Garh Narikel Memory Salt.” Asked where this salt will come from, and confronted by a little girl’s further question, he grows uneasy. Raghav Signal’s secret message—“Turn emotional material into a product”—is intercepted and read aloud; the merchant’s face falls. Ananya declares, “From today salt will be shared, not sold.” The women make a common pledge: “We shall not forget the labour in the salt we eat …” Satyavrat tastes it and his eyes fill. At dusk every household begins the practice

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Chapter 129 — The Oath of Salt

of speaking a name when adding salt to food. A New Horizon list for “taste-controlled nutrition” appears. Ira says, “There is salt there, but no memory.” That night two kabaddi teams are called “Salt” and “Nameless.” A grain of salt is given even to the losing side: defeat is not punishment but the practice of remembering. Budhba’s ghost says, “One who understands the taste of salt will take a long time to leave Earth.” Ananya concludes, “Salt does not ask for an oath; it becomes the taste of an oath,” and signals the next danger: the market’s assault on the smells of memory.

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Chapter 130 — Justice of Taste

Following the oath of salt, Ba declares, “We eat salt, and so must acknowledge the justice owed to salt.” A communal meal is prepared. Each household brings something; those without grain bring water. An elder invokes the dignity of separate caste rows at meals. Ba responds, “A dignity that asks hunger its caste is no dignity; it is an insult to the body.” Members of the heritage team arrive with artificial, scented packaged goods sold as “Channa Grove Memorial Feast,” “Memory Salt” and “Water-Burial Greens.” Ananya asks them, “Who was hungry? Who took the oath of salt?” Satyavrat takes the last seat in the eating row: “After those whose names were devoured.” Before the meal, a name is spoken with every mouthful, turning food

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Chapter 130 — Justice of Taste

Part 2 · The Main Story

2 / 3

into a record of bodies. Meera lays down a rule: whoever cooks tastes first, and whoever serves must sit down to eat. Ira writes to children abroad, “A village’s taste does not live in a recipe book … The taste of Mithila is a lie unless people are invited to sit together.” Near the stump’s green point a row is arranged even for the crocodiles. Ba says they must try to understand the hunger of creatures that have devoured bodies, so they can see the crocodile not simply as a monster but as a terrible question posed by the world. The heritage team’s proposal for a regularly ticketed event is rejected. The leaves used for the meal are buried in the soil by the river; each carries a half-letter—ka, na, ja. Gop Kumar says, “The

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Chapter 130 — Justice of Taste

paper register will survive, but the register of leaves will remain in the earth.” In the evening a mark of scent is found in the ash. Meera explains, “Taste stays on the tongue, but memory returns through smell. A home whose kitchen burned, a body that burned in a hospital—its name first returns as a smell.” An uncertain scent rises and fades from the stump. Ananya opens “Twenty-Seventh Watch: The Testimony of Smell.”

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Chapter 131 — The Shared Plate

After the justice of taste, a harder question arises: it is easy to hear stories of hunger and thirst separately, but difficult to sit together and eat from a common plate. Ba says, “Daughter, people here can sit with a ghost yet tremble at sitting in the same row with a living human being.” The contribution of each home is recorded as preparations are made for the shared meal. An elderly Brahmin hesitates at the food circle when he sees a young man from the leatherworkers’ settlement. Ba sits beside him and says sharply, “To hear of a marriage to a leatherworker woman, then protect the scripture and hide the woman, is not justice; it is the hypocrisy of hunger.” Ananya asks the old man, “Shall I write down the name of your

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Chapter 131 — The Shared Plate

Part 2 · The Main Story

fear?” He answers, “Lineage.” “And the name of your hunger?” “Human being.” Having spoken these words, he eats and exchanges greens and jaggery with the young leatherworker. Yet not every barrier falls. Some women cannot sit down for fear of family honour or their fathers-in-law. Meera says, “If they cannot sit, write that down too; what prevents them must also be named.” Their entries include “home,” “shame” and “a daughter’s marriage.” Chandrapal Batra trembles as he recalls the childhood humiliation of being made to sit in a separate eating row. At the back Satyavrat writes, “A mouth that has read the law must first learn equality in eating.” During the meal the children do not play kabaddi; instead they slowly join their

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Chapter 131 — The Shared Plate

breaths. “In kabaddi you touch someone and return; at the plate you touch someone and remain.” After the meal the leftover grains are mixed into the soil: “What remains is not waste but an offering.” Ananya writes, “Twenty-Seventh Watch: The Shared Plate … Wherever caste prevents a plate from being shared, justice eats incompletely.” Devika calls this “the first document of the next struggle.”

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Chapter 132 — The Republic of the Kitchen

After the shared plate, Meera says, “If caste remains tied to the kitchen, the sharing of a plate will be only a festival.” Ananya opens a new page, “The Test of the Kitchen.” Ba says, “The real test of justice comes not at the feast but when the dirty dishes have to be washed.” A people’s kitchen is built around Channa’s stump, and the story of each ingredient is told: rice from a field affected by the bridge debris, flattened rice rescued during a flood, greens from the leatherworkers’ settlement. Gangesha’s story returns to the kitchen. Ananya asks, “What is the nature of food? Is untouchability evidence of it, or hunger?” For the first time in his life an elderly Brahmin pours ghee into a pan of greens grown from the

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Chapter 132 — The Republic of the Kitchen

leatherworkers' seeds. The change of smell becomes the moment of "evidence." Kitchen labour is shared between women and men. Aruni laughs, "If we can build bridges, why can we not wash a strainer?" Meera establishes the rule, "No one's work shall be called low." Saumya says, "No cameras in the kitchen." Five hearths and seven pans together form the republic of the kitchen. The first portion is served to the nameless stone, "the one whose name was written nowhere." Those who stay away through fear of untouchability are not forced to eat: justice does not feed by compulsion but asks fear for its name. In a dream Batuknath sees sections of law turning into leaves. Chandrapal and Lau Kin-hung each sense a lack of memory in their own

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Chapter 132 — The Republic of the Kitchen

digital or nutrition-pill systems. Lau is told, “This is not data; it is memory of grain being cooked ... A nameless world may end hunger, but it cannot give birth to taste.” Washing the dishes becomes the “real test”: those who have spent their lives clearing plates are invited to sit, while those claiming “high lineage” wash. The new article reads: “Whoever eats shall cook; whoever cooks shall eat; whoever eats shall wash; whoever washes has sacred hands.” At the end Budhba’s ghost draws a fine line of salt across his forehead and says, “The next test will concern not leftovers, but seed and ash.”

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Chapter 133 — An Invitation to the Videha Theatre Festival

Part 2 · The Main Story

An invitation arrives from the “Videha Theatre Festival,” asking that the story of Garh Narikel be brought to the stage. The villagers are apprehensive: they remember the earlier procession of counterfeit ghosts. Ananya declares, “There will be a play, but only those who can hold their breath will act”—the children who play kabaddi will become the performers. They decide to turn the preceding 132 chapters into acts. Ananya explains, “A summary is like a crocodile: it chews up the body and leaves the bones. A play needs a body.” During kabaddi practice the children cross the line while reciting the names of earlier chapters—Water Burial, Present, Tattvachintamani. A child who calls out “Gangesha” is asked, “What is evidence?” The

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Chapter 133 — An Invitation to the Videha Theatre Festival

answer comes: “The body is also evidence; humiliation is also evidence; love is also evidence.” A festival representative asks for the script and performance date, but Ananya says, “In the act after the script ... necessity belongs in a play, not in testimony.” Rules are established. Meera insists, “No scene of another person's suffering without that person's consent.” Ira says, “Foreign spectators must listen first and claim to understand afterwards.” The character of Gangesha will enter carrying a question, not a book. Ananya prevents Batuknath's role from being reduced to that of a clown: “Making him a clown makes the crime seem less serious.” Chandrapal's role goes to a young man; two performers share Raghav's role—one speaks

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Chapter 133 — An Invitation to the Videha Theatre Festival

and the other disappears. Lau Kin-hung's role is dominated by silence: “Fewer lines, more silence.” A quiet child is cast as Satyavrat Mehta and explains, “Me, because I speak so little.” At night the kabaddi players repeat the names of the old acts softly. Budhba's ghost says, “The stage, too, is a grove. If its roots are false, its leaves become applause; if its roots are true, its leaves become names.” They decide to investigate the invitation itself: “The invitation will also give testimony.” The chapter closes as Ananya writes the first line of the play: “There is water in the middle of the stage; whoever enters must first speak the name of their own reflection.”

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Chapter 134 — The Kabaddi Players' Play Script

The children choose a title for the play: “The Watch,” with the subtitle “The Kabaddi Players' Play Script.” Its protagonist is not a person but breath. A deceased character will be called “Present,” not “Ghost”; a swindler will not wear the external colours of a villain but carry an inner emptiness. Ananya changes Ira's opening direction, “The spectators enter,” to “The witnesses enter”: “The witnesses will first see the names written on the stone.” No caste is entered beside any character's name in the cast list. “Caste is not a character; it is a cage, and the cage will hang empty on the stage.” They design a setting with a severed stump, a black strip of water, smoke from the kitchen and an empty cage. Nine scenes are

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Chapter 134 — The Kabaddi Players' Play Script

written: (1) Morning After the Felling, when all the characters say “Present”; (2) The Yellow Notice, where paper sheds sweat instead of letters; (3) Gangesha's Question, with the empty cage and his question descending as light; (4) The Memorial Application, where Chandrapal's percentages roll as silver coins, blackening at Devika's question; (5) The Counterfeit Ghost Procession, where a play within the play breaks apart and the actors speak the actual dead people's names; (6) The Unnamed Planet of the Dream, where everybody becomes a number, Lau Kin-hung's anonymous face says “No name,” and Ananya replies, “No name, then no life”; (7) The Republic of the Kitchen, where drops of salt eat through the cage's bars; (8) The Elephant,

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Chapter 134 — The Kabaddi Players' Play Script

the Crocodile, and a Child's Hand, with the elephant representing a drowning society and the crocodile the blind combined jaws of greed, caste, screens, hunger and thirst, while children pull with names. Debate then turns to the ninth and last scene, “Earth Again.” Ujjwal's spirit says, “If you stop the play, you lose the game.” A new Channa shoot will be placed onstage. The swindlers may touch it only if they can write down their own names without greed. After discussion, Ba settles on the final line: “Whoever still has breath has a story still to tell”; “Kabaddi has not ended. The game has merely moved beyond the globe of Earth into the chamber of memory.” The script is completed that night. Budhba's ghost advances one step in

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Chapter 134 — The Kabaddi Players' Play Script

an old kabaddi stance and stops. Ananya writes at the end, “Today the story became a script; tomorrow the script will demand a body,” signalling that the next act will be its performance.

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Chapter 135 — The Performance at the Videha Theatre Festival

The children build the stage as a level, circular playing field with a kabaddi line through its centre. In the first scene a boy's soft “kabaddi, kabaddi” gradually changes to “name, name.” A stone is placed for “Those Whose Names Were Not Found,” and the spectators become witnesses. In the second scene a crocodile—represented without a mask, only as a shadow—asks, “Give me a body and I will eat it, but what can I do if the children possess the names?” In the third, the water-burial scene, the player who has “drowned” rises slowly and sits by the stone: “The body drowned; the bonds fell away.” The fourth scene presents Gangesha's question through an empty seat. A girl asks, “If caste keeps watch over the human body, how can

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Chapter 135 — The Performance at the Videha Theatre Festival

justice be born on paper?” In the names of Ramanath Jha and Ashok comes the assertion, “When honour cuts away truth, that is the murder of memory.” In the fifth scene, as Batuknath's book opens, dry leaves fly out into the auditorium: “Who owns the trust?” In the sixth, Chandrapal's imitation phone screen begins showing his own incomplete name. In the seventh, Raghav's message falls like a leaf: “The earth reads even deleted messages.” In the eighth, Lau and Broom invite everyone to the “Unnamed Planet of the Dream,” and the kabaddi line leaps skyward to become a planetary game. In the ninth, the player portraying Lau asks, “Where is my name?” No answer comes. In the tenth, an empty chair stands in for Satyavrat Mehta's role.

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Chapter 135 — The Performance at the Videha Theatre Festival

Part 2 · The Main Story

Ananya says, “The chair will remain empty for anyone who did not come to listen”; Satyavrat, seated in the audience, trembles. The final scene is kabaddi in its pure form: each hold is an act of remembering, not violence. Organizers want to applaud, but the children stop them: “Applause marks the end of a performance, and tonight we do not want an end.” An old man, a woman, a young man and a migrant rise to say, “There is another name in our household that was not in this play.” The stage begins to spread through the voices of the people. Ba concludes, “It was not the grove but the roots that watched. When the roots accept a performance, the story returns to the soil.” Having completed its performance, the play thus returns to

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Chapter 135 — The Performance at the Videha Theatre Festival

the novel.

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Chapter 136 — The Silence After the Applause

The applause after the performance slowly turns into silence. The actors feel guilt at having acted out other people's suffering. The festival director breaks off a vote of thanks and asks those whose names were omitted from the play to come forward. The boundary between stage and audience dissolves. Spectators rise to speak their forgotten names. One woman asks, “My daughter is alive, but the family refuses to say her name. Should that name also be written?” Ananya answers, “Someone whose name has been silenced is no less than someone dead.” She separately instructs the boy playing Satyavrat Mehta: “Pain speaks for justice, not for praise.” Chandrapal Batra remains standing outside the hall; a message flashes on his phone: “Your

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Chapter 136 — The Silence After the Applause

name is written not on the stage but in the losses of the people.” Batuknath's representative tries to control the “rights” to the play, but Budhba's ghost asks, “Who can buy a story? Will someone make a receipt for breath?” The representative flees. On the question of authorship, Ira says, “The authorship of a story that comes from water burial will be like a river: it will flow, not be divided.” Meera adds, “An open space does not mean that anyone may invade another's privacy; permission must be asked every time.” That night the kabaddi players decide the next performance will not be a fixed play but a travelling watch, weaving in the names of people wherever it goes. Ananya draws a new “pledge of the stage” in the dust.

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Chapter 136 — The Silence After the Applause

Everyone crossing the line says “Present” instead of “kabaddi.” On the night's flag only the word “Videha” shines distinctly. The children explain it as “crossing beyond the body and returning to the dignity of the body.” At the close a line appears by itself in the dust of the stage: “Where the play ends, the village begins.” Ananya says it should remain outside the script, because “whoever reads it will write the next act.”

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Chapter 137 — The Spectators' Testimony

After the performance Ananya does not open the register: “Today let us first see whether the spectators wish to write of their own accord.” One by one people stand in the auditorium to testify. An elderly clerk admits that he had seen fraud in the count of bridge workers and kept silent. Producing an old yellowed list, he becomes “the first spectator-witness: the silent clerk.” A woman admits to involvement in black-marketing medicines during the COVID period, although her son died of the same disease, and hands over a key. A young man confesses to writing advertisements for a fraud scheme. Meera says, “Language has teeth; when it starts chewing up truth, it deserves punishment too.” Many smaller wrongs are acknowledged:

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Chapter 137 — The Spectators' Testimony

Part 2 · The Main Story

obstructing a marriage on caste grounds, remaining silent, or walking away saying “This is not my family's affair.” The narration observes that “small crimes join to become a great crocodile.” Batuknath Hariharan, hidden among the spectators, seems to shrink as he listens. Satyavrat Mehta remains seated but is shaken whenever he hears “I remained silent.” The kabaddi-player actors stand watch over the spectators' testimonies. Ira notes how wrongdoing and suffering are interwoven in testimony: “No human being is only one name.” Ananya announces, “Not a role—your own name,” deciding that the audience's testimony will be included in the next act. Meera warns, “The witness owns the testimony; the stage is only its servant.”

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Chapter 137 — The Spectators' Testimony

Chandrapal, Raghav and Broom, meanwhile, are already seeing an opportunity to commercialize this “audience-testimony” model. At night a green line gleams on the representation of the root left on the stage. The kabaddi players say “Present,” and the entire auditorium answers. The next morning a handwritten notice by the children appears on the gate: “In the next act the spectators' testimony will be added to the play script … Kabaddi continues.” The story is moving from the stage toward writing by the people themselves.

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Chapter 138 — The Procession Beyond the Stage

The play spreads beyond the auditorium. At a tea shop a woman has her brother's name entered in the tea-seller's credit book. At the bus stand a young actor, still wearing the ghost's white face-paint, says, “This colour will not wash off until my father's name is written in full.” At the rear door of the theatre the performers step out of their roles and speak their real names; several sound strikingly like the roles they played. The narrator finds on a new manuscript page a sentence written without ink: “When the audience takes a story inside itself, its author changes.” The children prepare a new form for spectator testimony: name, the person for whom one is present, and the destination of the story. Meera prevents private

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Chapter 138 — The Procession Beyond the Stage

statements from being printed: “The watch over names began with the voice; reaching the page must not change its limits of propriety.” Devika makes a rule: “Do not sell a fragment of suffering. Listen to its full context.” Chandrapal's application tries to upload “emotional scenes,” but the line “Names are not for sale” appears and blocks it. Throughout the night the word “Present” circles through Raghav Signal's code. Batuknath's secretary reports, “It is more than a crowd now; the people are giving testimony.” Batuknath realizes, “A crowd can be controlled, but testimony cannot.” On the empty stage Satyavrat Mehta touches the actual sweat-stained stone used in the performance and says, “The right to testify is older than the

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Chapter 138 — The Procession Beyond the Stage

court.” In the morning the kabaddi players play on the road outside the auditorium; no victor is declared. Ananya records: “The play has come outside; the stage has spread into the village's body.” Asked what to print in the next act, Ira replies, “Whatever we print, something will be left out. Print while acknowledging what has been omitted.” At the end a letter arrives from abroad. Children living overseas write, “We too shall perform the play, but first we shall listen to the names.” The procession is about to cross the sea.

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Chapter 139 — The Theatre of the Road

The play moves completely from the hall onto the road. A milk carrier, a vegetable seller and a rickshaw puller become spectators for a moment. At various points along the way the kabaddi players draw “entry boundaries.” The first performance is in the market: in everyday clothes a player says “Present,” and the people spontaneously respond. The following day a short leaflet is distributed at the bus stand. The conductor reads it aloud himself: “If a name is missing from a ticket, does that mean there is no passenger? If a name is missing from life, does that mean there is no human being?” The third scene takes place in the courthouse veranda. A girl sets down a blank sheet and asks, “In which column should we place the evidence

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Chapter 139 — The Theatre of the Road

of a life that has been crushed?" Lime falls from the wall onto the paper, making a stain that is called "the wall's answer." Satyavrat Mehta listens instead of writing the scene down. The fourth performance is outside a pharmacy. The shopkeeper confesses, "I too raised the prices. I profited when people were afraid." Meera tells him, "The first breath of testimony may begin with guilt, but it must not end there." Traders, politicians and officials object. The children answer, "We are not inciting anyone; we are reading names." Batuknath Hariharan searches for legal avenues involving permissions and crowd control, but an invisible hand writes "Present" on the page. He realizes, "Channa Grove has entered the veranda." Chandrapal

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Chapter 139 — The Theatre of the Road

wants to install a camera, but the women stop him: “We will not put memory up for sale again.” Only blank pages open in his application. Raghav Signal attempts to record the events in a code called “moving play,” but the messages break apart: with no central owner, leader or account, the map of his conspiracy grows obscure. Far away, Lau Kin-hung understands: “These people will not abandon Earth. Once memory begins to perform on the road, it cannot be bought with a contract for another planet.”

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Chapter 140 — The Travelling Assembly

Part 2 · The Main Story

After the theatre of the road, the children set a rule: every performance site will end with a game, but no victory or defeat will be announced. A player crosses the boundary, asks for a name and returns before losing breath; hearing the whole name counts as success, otherwise another breath is needed. They call this game-assembly the “Travelling Assembly.” It requires only three things: an open place, ears willing to listen and a name that has not been heard. At evening the procession returns to the stump tired but satisfied. Ananya writes, “Today the story came back having learned the road.” A little boy writes, “A play is not merely what happens on a stage. A play is what forces life to confess its own falsehoods.” Ba

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Chapter 140 — The Travelling Assembly

declares, “Now it is life's turn ... The real theatre is the kitchen, the veranda, the field, the room, the office, the court, the phone and sleep.” At night two policemen arrive on bicycles with a notice about “unauthorized obstruction of a public road.” The children do not panic. Ananya sets the notice on the edge of the stump, where the yellow notice had once been placed. Satyavrat Mehta says, “We shall read it tomorrow,” but Budhba's voice replies, “Not read it—play it.” The chapter ends with the promise of a kabaddi game involving the paper on the following day, in which names will be recovered by stealing a breath from the lines of law.

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Chapter 141 — The Verdict in the Veranda

Even after the performance in the courthouse veranda ends, the people do not leave. Satyavrat Mehta sees the shadow of his former silence. An elderly litigant says, “My case went on for twenty-three years. My son grew old waiting. Who will write the papers of my life?” A frightened clerk admits that he was afraid of losing his job. The children record, “Fear of losing one's job is another form of silence.” A former student of Batuknath, now an advocate, lays his coat on the stone: “We learned the language of law, but not the language of listening to justice.” The slips recording successive hearing dates fall from his pocket and are read aloud: behind each date lies the loss of part of someone's named life. Devika announces,

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Chapter 141 — The Verdict in the Veranda

“There has been a play in this veranda; now there will be a lesson,” and the dates are written on stone rather than on paper. Meera stops young men carrying cameras: “Permission first.” A performer from the counterfeit-ghost procession admits, “I earned money pretending to be a ghost. Today I understood that the ghost lives in the paper that could never become a verdict.” Asked by a student how weeping can constitute evidence, Aruni points to the old litigant's swollen feet and his register: “If evidence is confined to paper, a poor person's life will always remain unproven.” The veranda is not empty even at midnight; a tea-seller lights a stove. At last Satyavrat offers an old page: “The courthouse veranda is not outside the

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Chapter 141 — The Verdict in the Veranda

court. It is the court's unheard ear.” Ananya adds, “When that ear opens, the veranda will become a courtroom.” Leaving at dawn, the elderly litigant says, “I have not received a judgment today, but the waiting I endured has received a name.” At the end, dust on the old files in the court's records room begins turning into letters: “Read us too, but in a way that lets the human being trapped inside the paper come out.” The next struggle is moving into the darkness of the records room.

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Chapter 142 — Darkness in the Records Room

The courthouse records room is opened the following day. Bhikhari Lal, the attendant, says, “The lock is not old; the breath inside is heavy.” Everyone is touched by the smell of dust, “the smell of waiting that was never heard.” Ananya calls the papers packed in sacks for disposal “humiliated paper.” Meera cautions, “When paper tears, a name is wounded again.” In the first file, behind a land dispute, they find a torn wedding invitation: “A social death is hidden inside a legal dispute.” In the second, five applications bear the stamp “Received,” but none has received an answer. Bhikhari Lal acknowledges his part. The third file contains a knot of red thread, resembling the thread from a bird's beak, and concerns a young man's

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Chapter 142 — Darkness in the Records Room

change of caste surname. Aruni says, “Cutting away a name is not merely cutting letters; it is cutting away a person's future.” Satyavrat Mehta admits, “If the dust of the records room never touches a judge's body, the judge goes on believing himself clean.” An elderly woman who spent the night in the veranda enters to look for her husband's file and sits on a stone. “I have sat on stone for years. A chair no longer feels real.” After six attempts they find a document bearing half a name. She says, “Even half a name is a name, if someone will listen to it in full.” Devika proposes a list of missing files: “A person must not be declared finished simply because the file cannot be found.” Batuknath's former student begins lifting

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Chapter 142 — Darkness in the Records Room

papers without charging a fee. Satyavrat writes a brief but far-reaching order: “Every file in the records room shall be recounted; a public list of missing files shall be prepared; and a provisional record of the oral testimony of waiting litigants shall be made.” Ananya prevents applause: “This is not an hour of victory. It is the beginning of a watch.” The register closes with the entry, “Today, in the records room, darkness was asked its name.” The fight for the existence of those whose files are lost has begun.

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Chapter 143 — Testimony from the Sack of Wastepaper

Meera warns, “What is now called wastepaper may bear someone's last hope of living.” They open a sack and find pages marked “Plaintiff present, hearing adjourned” and “Original record unavailable.” Aruni says, “It is not the original record that has become unavailable; the original human being was made absent.” The clerk recalls the weight of writing “records not available” year after year. Satyavrat Mehta reads a widow's application that had been marked “unclear.” He realizes that the system was unaccustomed to reading sorrow. On one page they find only “Hear me” and a thumbprint. Ananya says, “If the name has not survived, protect the sentence.” Bhikhari Lal admits, “I was taught to clear away old papers. No one told me that

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Chapter 143 — Testimony from the Sack of Wastepaper

old weeping lives inside old papers.” Meera asks that his name be entered too: “Writing a name is not a disaster; erasing a name is.” A bundle contains a dispute between a brother and sister over land, in which a footpath has been omitted from the survey. A girl named Neelima begins drawing in the missing path. A file linked to Lau bears documents stamped “irrelevant.” Satyavrat realizes that the wastepaper sack “may not merely be the result of negligence; it may also be part of a plan.” Meera cautions, “Protect the testimony. Do not sell the witness's body.” The children classify the files as dead, living and half-dead. “A file is alive when someone is still holding their breath, waiting because of it.” The elderly litigant

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Chapter 143 — Testimony from the Sack of Wastepaper

believes he has found his brother's application, but Meera intervenes: “Resemblance is the start of testimony, not the end of proof.” They retain the emptied sack as a warning, labelled “Testimony was suppressed here.” Budhba's ghost says, “It is easy to call something waste. It is harder for it to rise and become testimony.” Ananya writes at the end, “What was thrown among waste will return as the first witness in the court of justice.”

Chapter 144 — The Journey of Names

At night the names begin to “travel” beyond the paper. In the morning mysterious traces—lines of earth and iron filings—are found on the veranda's stone. Meera establishes a rule: “Taking news is one thing, taking dignity is another. Making a procession out of someone's wounds is also a kind of plunder.” They divide the list of names into three groups: the living, whose permission will be sought; the dead, whose families will be traced; and the unknown, whose names will be read in remembrance by Channa Grove, not turned into a spectacle. Satyavrat Mehta says, “If a procedure does not protect a human being, it is only a latch.” A young advocate arrives without his coat and offers help. Aruni replies, “Help, but do not become the

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Chapter 144 — The Journey of Names

owner.” The first journey concerns Jasoda Devi's file. Bhikhari Lal, Devika, the young advocate and the children travel to a village across the river, gathering memories from the boatman. Jasoda Devi is dead, but they find her niece, now an elderly woman. With permission they read out the line bearing her name. “Is that name still alive?” asks the niece. Jasoda's field is now occupied. A warehouse watchman tries to dismiss them: “What good will it do to dig up old matters?” Bhikhari Lal responds, “The paper did not change while it was in the wrong hands. Now it will go into the hands of names.” A second journey is planned for a worker named Lalan Mandal, whose name has an uncertain spelling. Satyavrat says, “Ask before correcting

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Chapter 144 — The Journey of Names

a name. Do not force the paper's version of a name on the human being.” At night the performers wish to stage a play about these names, but Meera forbids it: “Let the names first re-enter their own homes.” Satyavrat speaks to the clerk, who prepares a separate note about his fear, “Statement on an Employee's Silence”: injustice arises not only from those who commit crimes above but also from the fear of those below. Ananya concludes, “The journey of names will not end on its first day. For a name that finds no home, we will make a place by Channa Grove.” At dawn the first list is lodged in three copies: in the records room, the veranda and Channa Grove.

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Chapter 145 — The First Crack in Fear

The three copies of the names list—in the records room, the veranda and Channa Grove—begin travelling along their separate paths. The copy at Channa Grove bears a pledge: “Whoever can be brought home will be taken there; whoever finds no home will be given a place in the memory of this grove.” News spreads rapidly. Chandrapal panics; Raghav laughs at first and then falls silent. Lau Kin-hung sees his old, fabricated testimony slips for the first time as though they bear tooth marks. Batuknath's successors worry: “Do not let Gurudev's name appear.” At noon a court official scolds the clerk, but the clerk reads his “Statement on an Employee's Silence”: “What was called wastepaper held a human being's petition. For years I endured

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Chapter 145 — The First Crack in Fear

its dust.” Bhikhari Lal too admits, “I called it waste. Now I say it was not waste.” Satyavrat Mehta tells the official, “I am giving procedure its human being back.” At Channa Grove the elderly litigant reads names to his grandson: “This name belongs less to me than to the waiting that continued into your father's lifetime.” A widow's daughter speaks about the word “unclear” written on her mother's application: “My mother's handwriting was crooked, but what she said was straight.” Devika records, “Not unclear handwriting, but unclear justice.” Chandrapal's envoy objects to publishing the list, but Meera stands firm. Rumours spread by night; nevertheless the village has begun asking, “Is the name in the paper or not?” In a

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Chapter 145 — The First Crack in Fear

meeting of the perpetrators' side in an official's room, an elderly advocate opens the first crack in fear: “You can change the locks, but where will you lock away names? Three copies of the file exist, the people have heard them, and the time of fear is passing.” Ananya announces, “Starting tomorrow we go from house to house; we shall write no story without permission.” Meera adds, “Those who spread fear begin to be identified the day people ask, Whom are you protecting?” A fine green point appears through the bark of the stump, but the children do not touch it: “To turn proof of life immediately into a proclamation is itself a kind of violence.”

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Chapter 146 — The Stain of the Seal

Ananya opens an old bundle marked “Special Records.” Inside are the papers of ordinary people's suffering, each bearing the same kind of round seal. Aruni sees “Verified” stamped on a dispute over a field boundary and says, “A lie that devoured a body was declared verified.” In a woman's file, Meera finds the same date marked both “Attended” and “Applicant absent.” She asks, “How can one woman be both present and absent on the same day?” Chandrapal's former clerk, who acted as a middleman in both the revenue and regular courts, becomes anxious. Satyavrat Mehta encourages him. The clerk admits, “I did not lose the files. I merely sent them upstairs, and they never came down.” Asked “Who was upstairs?” he says nothing. Devika sorts

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Chapter 146 — The Stain of the Seal

the pages into attendance, rejection, missing record and red seal. “Injustice does not occur just once. It accumulates in heaps.” Seeing a seal stamped across a thumbprint, the old litigant whispers, “They pressed down my thumb like that too.” The court clerk brings out three old seals. Ananya asks whether their users also bear responsibility for what was written with them. The former clerk panics: “If all the names come out, the village will burn.” Satyavrat replies, “Has the village not already burned? Some fires continue inside bodies for years.” The clerk produces a secret list whose last line reads “By order of B.H.”—an indication of Batuknath Hariharan. Ananya wraps the original in red cloth: “Even the dust of evidence must

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Chapter 146 — The Stain of the Seal

be preserved.” Outside, a rumour spreads that Raghav left for the city during the night. A child brings a stone from near the stump, marked with a red stain and scratched with the words “Read the names.” Meera warns, “Now begins the most dangerous period. When papers start becoming evidence, people who burn papers are born.” Bhikhari Lal hands Ananya his key, but she says, “Keep the key in your own hand. The difference is that your hand will no longer be alone.” By afternoon the register of seals fills twenty pages. The chapter ends with the first lamp being lit in the records room and an entry: “When a seal is stamped upon a human being, the first act of justice is to make that person's outline visible again.”

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Chapter 147 — Knocking from Door to Door

After examining the stains of the seals in the records room, the group begins calling from house to house. Meera says, “We are not going to make proclamations; we are going to listen.” The first home is that of Surmani Devi. On hearing her name she seems to come alive in what remains of her body. “I did not write this paper myself. The land-record clerk's son wrote it. But where in his handwriting was my weeping?” Her granddaughter brings seeds, bangles and soil from an old box: “Evidence of land is not only a survey register; it is also the soil of memory.” The second home is that of Rameshwar Sah. His daughter-in-law is frightened at first, but Meera says, “I am not reopening the lawsuit. I am writing down the name of

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Chapter 147 — Knocking from Door to Door

exhaustion.” Bhikhari Lal apologizes for the first time: “I never understood whose hearth remained unlit when I handed over a slip.” The third home belongs to Phulkumari. Her mother's insistence—“Write it not as charity, but as a right”—makes clear that the scholarship had been withheld because of poverty, not “insufficient evidence.” The children do not force closed doors. They leave a note: “If you wish, we can come and listen.” Chandrapal's people and Raghav's advisers spread rumours, but Nandu the blacksmith replies, “Was there peace in a home where the hearth did not burn?” Satyavrat and the clerk prepare copies; the clerk now seeks intelligibility rather than stamping everything “unclear.” In the evening Murari, the

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Chapter 147 — Knocking from Door to Door

photocopy-shop owner, returns extra copies he had kept because the families could not pay and asks forgiveness. Devika says, “Sometimes a copy saved through theft helps the truth, but that does not erase the theft.” At night conspirators meet in Chandrapal's home. Batuknath's representative proposes, “It is easier to mix lies into a crowd of truths than to defeat truth itself.” Meera has already anticipated the danger and writes five rules, including hearing each account twice, distinguishing the language of accusation from the language of experience, and never declaring someone guilty before a crowd. The old litigant cautions, “The road of truth may be slow, but not so slow that another generation passes.” Ananya records the

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Chapter 147 — Knocking from Door to Door

first day's work. In Channa Grove's shade comes the sound of a crocodile moving: perhaps the knock of names has reached even it.

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Chapter 148 — Identifying Adulteration

Part 2 · The Main Story

Meera declares, “Examination does not mean mistrust; it protects names.” The first visitor calls himself “Bhola Mandal” and brings a polished story. Asked by Meera what the earth smelled like, he replies, “Earth smells like earth,” which raises suspicion. Devika notices the distinctive fold of his copy and its blue ink. Under questioning by Bhikhari Lal, “Bhola Mandal” admits that he is Bhikhan Sah, sent by Raghav's people for two hundred rupees to tell a false story. Meera records the incident separately: “Attempt to give false testimony; source: Raghav's people.” The next visitor is Jagmaya. Her husband's name is “Harimohan Jha” on the paper but “Mohan” at home; this discrepancy is a sign of truth rather than deceit. Asked

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Chapter 148 — Identifying Adulteration

precisely what she took with her on her first visit to court, she remembers a medicine box and begins laughing and weeping together. The receipt is examined and verified. Satyavrat Mehta says, “This is not merely proof of payment; it is a surviving voice of presence.” Meera sets a rule: “Examine what is said; do not measure a human being before a crowd.” At noon three young men arrive with separate papers in identical handwriting, chanting “We want justice.” When Devika questions them separately, their stories fall apart. A child admits seeing one of the men on Raghav's veranda, and Meera immediately protects the child. Instead of destroying false papers, they place them in a bag marked “Suspected Adulteration.” Meera says, “Even

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Chapter 148 — Identifying Adulteration

a lie is evidence. Preserve it, so we can identify the hand that manufactures the adulteration.” Murari the photocopier admits that Raghav pressured him to make three false copies, though he deliberately left scratches. Meera replies, “A crime committed out of fear remains a crime, but the small scratch made in the direction of truth will also be recorded.” Jagmaya takes her original receipt home and leaves only a copy: “We need a copy, not ownership.” At night the bag of suspect papers is tied with red thread, not locked: “A lock imprisons trust. Red thread reminds us that if we open it, we shall do so in everyone's presence.” Raghav realizes the game is slipping from his grasp. Satyavrat writes, “Justice needs not only a list

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Chapter 148 — Identifying Adulteration

of truths but also an account of the method of lying.”

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Chapter 149 — Mapping the Network

Meera says, “We shall open the box, but not open accusations. First examine the marks, then the connections.” Bhikhari Lal begins measuring the physical papers. The left corners of Bhikhan Sah's paper and those of the three young men have been cut in the same way, but Murari's scratches occur only on the young men's copies. This suggests that lies were being manufactured in two places. Satyavrat Mehta remarks, “The method of falsehood opens the road to truth.” Devika detects a smell of incense in the papers. The clerk explains that incense is burned daily on Raghav's veranda to make documents look old. A copy is made of Jagmaya's photograph and belongings, and Meera returns the originals. On the soil they draw a map of the

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Chapter 149 — Mapping the Network

network: three circles—Raghav's veranda, Murari's shop and the court records room—joined by lines. The clerk gives his name as Kailash Prasad and admits that on Raghav's people's instructions some files were labelled “temporarily unavailable.” “A bribe is not always money. Sometimes it is a promise to prevent a transfer; sometimes it is a threat.” Four people—Meera, Satyavrat, Bhikhari Lal and Kailash—search beneath a wooden plank in the records room. There they find a single sheet bearing both Batuknath's ashram seal and a court record number. An index card carries the code “circulation”: the file had passed among Raghav, Batuknath and Chandrapal. Aruni says, “The crocodile does not walk on four feet; it walks on four

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Chapter 149 — Mapping the Network

institutions.” Bhikhan Sah voluntarily brings the two-hundred-rupee note as evidence. His faltering account is put in a new section called “Confessions of Pressure.” When a thread is stretched and the angle of light changed, Murari's scratch becomes clear. He says, “I committed the wrong out of fear, but inwardly hoped that one day it would be discovered.” Satyavrat responds firmly, “That hope does not wash away the crime.” Meera adds, “But it may become a crack through which the network can be broken.” An unidentified umbrella-bearing carrier of Chandrapal's files appears in the distance. They have a clue, though not yet a name. The box is closed with the map, copies, statements and evidence under the title “First Outline of the

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Chapter 149 — Mapping the Network

Network.” A green point is visible again at the stump's root.

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Chapter 150 — The Shadow of the Seal

Seeing the ashram seal and court record number together on the index card, Ananya says, “Without following the route of this seal we cannot see the body of the network.” Meera stops any rush to judgment: “Do not raid the ashram the moment you see its seal.” Satyavrat Mehta finds a minute cut in the seal's circular rim. Kailash Prasad says an old temporary seal was reported “lost” about ten years earlier, at the time of a religious event at Batuknath's ashram. A trail of recollection leads to papers from an old ashram room that were sold at Chedi the scrap dealer's shop. Meera, Ananya, Bhikhari Lal and Murari visit him. Chedi recalls selling “a heavy brass-like piece, semicircular, with a cut edge and reversed letters” to a

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Chapter 150 — The Shadow of the Seal

wandering metal buyer nicknamed “Coin.” The remembered season—after Nag Panchami—connects the events. In Chedi's sack they find the torn cover of the ashram's donation register and donor names: Chandrapal, Raghav and “Bha … la …” Bhikhari Lal suggests this may be Bhanu Lal, an old seal-maker whose son Ramesh Muhariya makes rubber stamps near the station. On the way they meet Surmani Devi. In the donation register, opposite her husband Shyamsundar's name, she finds “settlement service.” She realizes, “We were not being soothed; we were being entangled.” In the afternoon they visit Ramesh's shop. Bhanu Lal's register says, “Special round seal, for temporary court; later recut and used in the ashram's name.” Satyavrat is

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Chapter 150 — The Shadow of the Seal

stunned. Ramesh remembers his father's last words: “Make seals, but do not become the sin of the seal.” Haricharan—the previously unnamed umbrella-bearer—arrives with a threat of a defamation suit from Chandrapal's office. Meera answers calmly, “We are recording connections, not writing accusations.” Haricharan's movements are added to the map. Jagmaya says, “My Mohan could not find his way to court, but his paper has travelled through so many houses.” Lamps are placed beside each circle on the map at dusk. Satyavrat says, “Sometimes measuring the shadow of injustice is the first step toward justice.” Surmani Devi sets her empty water pot beside the stump. At night Ramesh brings the surviving wooden handle of Bhanu Lal's old

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Chapter 150 — The Shadow of the Seal

seal, without the rubber. Meera has it placed beside the stump: “Let people see that a seal is held in a hand; it is not a god.”

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Chapter 151 — The Hand That Used the Seal

Ramesh Muhariya repeats his father Bhanu Lal's last words: “Son, use the seal, but do not question what it says. If a seal begins asking questions, the household will drown.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “When a seal falls into the wrong hands, the result is not government but the discipline of theft.” Bhikhari Lal admits having carried sealed papers inside without reading them many times. Two young men from the ashram explain this was done “for convenience,” but their limited training becomes evident. Jagmaya brings an unfinished letter from Mohan: “The paper received its seal, but I could not read how I had become a stranger on my own land.” A second page of Bhanu Lal's register contains the codes A, Ch, R and A-sh. Bhikhari Lal

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Chapter 151 — The Hand That Used the Seal

identifies them as court, Chandrapal, Raghav and ashram. They begin comparing dates and three matches emerge at once. Bhikhan, the tea-seller, recalls a mysterious customer who drank tea without sugar on Raghav's veranda and kept red thread in his pocket. The nameless umbrella-bearer's identity is discovered: Ramlakhan Sahay, who had worked in the court, for Chandrapal and at the ashram. Ramlakhan is brought in that evening. When Meera shows him the seal handle, he begins to speak. Blank paper, he admits, was stamped first and the words filled in afterwards. Asked “Whose order?” he replies, “There was not one name; everyone did it.” Meera calls this “the first defence of collective wrongdoing.” Asked about Batuknath, he says, “In

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Chapter 151 — The Hand That Used the Seal

Batuknath's time the seal was worshipped; after he went away, the seal became a business.” Surmani Devi comments, “When someone is made into a god, another person opens a shop on his seat.” Haricharan tries to defend the ashram, but Devika challenges him: “If the ashram is sacred, how did papers bearing its name fall into impure hands?” The victims express their separate hopes: Jagmaya wants Mohan's name restored, Surmani wants water, and Bhikhari Lal wants the dimensions of culpability established. A drop of water mysteriously glimmers in the empty pot beside the stump. Ramlakhan's statement is only half complete when night falls. Satyavrat says, “The language of suspicion incites a crowd; the language of investigation

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Chapter 151 — The Hand That Used the Seal

identifies the hand.” Ananya writes, “Today we wrote down the hand. Tomorrow we shall write down the order.”

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Chapter 152 — The Source of the Order

Meera announces a new rule: “When searching for the source of an order, do not rush at a person; attend to the language.” Wrongdoers change their names, she says, but not the language of instructions—“service,” “procedure,” “orders from above.” Satyavrat Mehta observes, “If a paper says it comes from above but gives no name for ‘above,’ that is not an order; it is pressure.” Bhikhari Lal produces an old slip with a red border, an instruction without a name and a distinctive mark in blue ink. The same mark appeared in Bhanu Lal's register and the donation book. Ramlakhan Sahay admits, “The decision had already been made; all that remained was to put it on paper.” Satyavrat realizes that the court had become only a stage. Ramlakhan

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Chapter 152 — The Source of the Order

names Mahavir Pathak, once a student of scripture under Batuknath and later a “silent writer” for the ashram and Chandrapal. Mahavir lives on the back road from the ashram. Meera greets him respectfully without making accusations. He initially denies recognizing the mark, but after a long silence admits it was a reminder of meetings: “What was settled orally would be indicated on a slip by a sign.” With permission they open the household chest and find three registers: “Memories of Meetings,” “Reflections on Service” and “Principles of Settlement.” A coded phrase, “piece of grove,” points toward Channa Grove. One entry reads: “A direct claim upon the piece of grove is difficult; revive the memory of religious use and circulate

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Chapter 152 — The Source of the Order

the language of public benefit.” In “Reflections on Service,” blue figures—1, 2, 5, 8—stand beside religious language, matching coded dates from Bhanu Lal's book. Haricharan bursts in to defend the ashram, but Satyavrat clarifies, “Ideas are not crimes. But if files were stopped because of an idea, that idea becomes a source of orders.” Ramlakhan recognizes “circulate the language of public benefit”; he had heard it in Chandrapal's office. On a fourth page are arrows linking “court,” “office,” “veranda” and “ashram,” with “Key phrase: voluntarily” in the centre. Jagmaya confirms that Mohan's coerced document said “voluntarily.” Meera stops Mahavir from offering “forgiveness” as an answer: “Forgiveness cannot take the place of

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Chapter 152 — The Source of the Order

testimony; tell the whole story first.” Surmani Devi remarks bitterly, “The names of those who could not stop it were preserved; those whom it stopped lost their land.” A crowd grows in the evening, but Meera prevents violence: “Those turned into stones for years must not diminish their justice by throwing stones.” Copies are taken to the stump; the original registers remain sealed at Mahavir's home. “We shall not seize the originals. Seizure too is the language of crime.” Ananya concludes, “From tomorrow we will seek the names behind the signs.”

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Chapter 153 — The Names Behind the Signs

Stakes are set beside the coded phrases in the registers: “southern farmer,” “widow across the river,” “old lawsuit,” “piece of grove” and “land near the temple orchard.” Meera establishes a rule: “It is also honest to leave blank what we do not know.” An elderly man, Ramparikshit Paswan, connects “southern farmer” with his uncle Devan Paswan, but carefully says, “I say perhaps. Do not write a complete name without complete proof.” Devan's name goes in the “recollection” section rather than being treated as established evidence. In response to “widow across the river,” a teenage girl named Kamla brings a bundle belonging to her grandmother Phoolkali Devi: a clod of soil, a soot-stained cloth and an incomplete page bearing

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Chapter 153 — The Names Behind the Signs

“voluntarily.” Surmani Devi explains the true meaning of voluntary consent: “Telling a hungry person that they gave something gladly is not consent ... Surrounding a widow alone and taking her thumbprint is not consent.” Ramlakhan remembers Phoolkali's brother-in-law obtaining her thumbprint on a donation deed. Her name enters the list of “initial names.” Meera cautions, “Care, not celebration. Finding a name does not mean obtaining justice.” A new letter, B, emerges in Bhanu Lal's coded register. Devika whispers, “Batuknath?” Meera immediately says, “Not a name yet, only a possibility.” Mahavir Pathak arrives and urges them not to place the B-code upon Batuknath. Surmani answers sharply, “If a man regarded as a father allows the

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Chapter 153 — The Names Behind the Signs

child's thumbprint to be taken for someone else's papers, the word ‘father’ too must be examined.” Ramlakhan discloses an entry: “Read Baba's words later.” Satyavrat records: “Unnamed Baba: higher source of instructional language.” In Mohan's letter Jagmaya finds a line too: “Not all who speak in the name of the grove have their names on paper.” Satyavrat observes, “Words whose power comes from devotion have less need of a signature, and words that smell of crime have greater fear of one.” Kamla places her clod of soil beside the stump, and Ramparikshit, Devan's nephew, rests his walking stick there. Two lost names meet beside the same earth. Haricharan warns that these papers will not stand up in court. Satyavrat replies, “What

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Chapter 153 — The Names Behind the Signs

does not survive in court may survive in history.” Before leaving Mahavir says, “Not all of Baba's words are written down.” Devika answers, “That is how people came to be crushed beneath the paper.” By the end a list exists, but no name has been established completely. Batuknath's shadow has acquired a direction.

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Chapter 154 — Baba's Words

Satyavrat Mehta writes, “Devise a way to hear words that were never written down.” Meera sets the rule: “Today we shall neither honour anyone merely by calling him Baba nor accuse anyone by calling him a criminal. First identify the movement of the words”—the utterance, the speaker and its consequence. Mahavir Pathak brings copies of four registers, the cloth from Baba's seat and a bell cord. From “Memories of Meetings” they read phrases such as “Keep the southern settlement quiet,” “Make the donation-deed language as simple as possible,” and “Delay the old names.” The phrase “consent from above” also appears. Meera places Baba, above, public benefit and service in one circle of terms. Three dates stand beside the letter B in

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Chapter 154 — Baba's Words

Bhanu Lal's code; two match other records. Elderly Sharda Jha, a former cook at the ashram, comes forward: “Baba rarely gave direct names, but often gave hints … I was rolling bread and thought it was talk of religion. Later I understood: my hands rolled the bread, but the decisions cooked in somebody else's stomach.” When Satyavrat questions her, she says plainly, “Everyone said it, and I said it too, but calling someone Baba does not make him innocent.” For the first time Batuknath Hariharan and “Baba” are linked explicitly. Meera's record retains the qualification: “No direct signature giving the order yet.” Ramlakhan Sahay produces a slip obtained from Bhanu Lal: “Baba said, put the date of the donation deed in the previous

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Chapter 154 — Baba's Words

month.” This is compared with a statement by Ramparikshit Paswan's uncle: “I was not in the village that day, but the paper said I was present.” Sharda recalls another direction: “Quiet a name that weeps too much by giving service.” Aruni calls it “pacification, not redress.” When Haricharan objects that they are putting religion in the dock, Meera responds, “Not religion, but decisions made in religion's name. A religion afraid of questions is not religion; it is a chair.” The children draw a “map of utterances,” with “Baba/Batuknath” in the middle and branches all around. Satyavrat comments, “You have not studied law, but you are devising a procedure.” At dusk the cloth from Baba's old seat is opened; Meera has it examined, not

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Chapter 154 — Baba's Words

worshipped. Kamla, Ramparikshit and Sharda place their objects of recollection—soil, walking stick and the cracks in their hands—around the seat, three generations of memory. Reading the final list, Meera says, “Today, through recollection, the word Baba has for the first time been associated with Batuknath Hariharan. The proof is not yet complete, but the direction is clearer.” Ananya concludes, “Today we heard Baba's words. Their answer remains due.”

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Chapter 155 — The Account of Service

Ananya opens a new section, “Consequences After the Words.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “Today read not the language of crime but the language of benefits within a system.” Devika draws up three pages—donation, service and silence—and Aruni adds a fourth: “What was given in return?” Mahavir Pathak brings a register of “service expenditure” recording rice for Phoolkali, medical aid for Devan, devotional feasts in the southern settlement and clothing for a widow. Kamla asks whether her grandmother actually received rice. Surmani Devi replies, “If she lost her land in return for rice, how can we call it service?” Sharda Jha brings an old bag and recalls the kitchen: “The homes in whose names rice was issued grew quieter afterwards ...

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Chapter 155 — The Account of Service

Rice given during hunger to suppress the paper of someone's rights is not food but rope.” Ramlakhan Sahay admits that the pages of the service account were kept separately; wherever there was fear of a lawsuit, an expense was entered opposite that person's name. He also admits that his daughter's medicine was paid for from the same account, explaining his silence. Kailash Mandal, Sakuni Khatun and Hariballabh Das come from the southern settlement to relate their experiences of being required to stay silent in exchange for assistance. Hariballabh's father received a payment for devotional singing on condition that he would not claim rights over the southern settlement road leading to Channa Grove. When Haricharan objects,

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Chapter 155 — The Account of Service

Satyavrat answers, “Investigation does not destroy what is pure.” Sharda brings the feast list of the “Channa Service Sankirtan.” Families involved in disputes are especially numerous, and there is an unfinished entry headed “New Resolution.” Sakuni Khatun's illiterate mother gave a thumbprint believing it acknowledged her attendance at a meal. Meera says, “A thumbprint is the body's trust. Placing it on the wrong page is theft of trust.” Ananya adds a column headed “Reason” on the silence page: hunger, medicine, daughter, reputation, caste and fear. The final page of Mahavir's book bears “Baba's blessing: Feast of Silence,” dated near Phoolkali Devi's donation deed. Surmani says harshly, “Telling someone who has lost a home to

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Chapter 155 — The Account of Service

forget is killing them a second time.” Kamla lays a clod of soil beside the book: “A feast of silence in exchange for Grandmother's land?” Ramparikshit Paswan says, “I want a search, not an oath.” Meera's concluding statement is cautious: “The account of service was not only a list of aid. It may also have been a system for organizing silence. This is not yet a final conclusion, but the shape of the network is becoming visible.”

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Chapter 156 — The Debt of Donation

Meera begins examining those who had raised their hands only halfway. Satyavrat Mehta says, “First understand how indebtedness takes up residence inside the body.” Kailash Mandal admits that medical treatment saved his father's life, but afterwards the ashram's people said, “Will someone whose father survived through Baba's mercy question Baba's land?” Meera calls this “the process of changing kindness into shame.” Sakuni Khatun recalls her mother being told in a village council, “You are poor; educated people understand paperwork.” “Poverty is not only hunger,” she says, “but also being removed from decisions.” Hariballabh Das says that because his father had received a devotional musician's payment, he regarded questioning Baba

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Chapter 156 — The Debt of Donation

as sinful. Haricharan Tiwari remarks sarcastically, “The one who ate is guilty; the one who gave is virtuous.” Satyavrat rejects the comparison: “The one who ate because of hunger and the one who exploited hunger to suppress a document cannot be weighed on the same scale.” Ramlakhan Sahay comes forward and admits, “I am guilty, but not alone.” Ananya calls this “bound-up wrongdoing.” Kamla asks Mahavir, “Did no one in your house ask why Grandmother's land did not appear in the service account?” She adds, “A poor person's land is not greed; it is the shade of their body.” Nirmala the potter raises another issue. She donated pots, yet “what the poor give is not even called a donation; what the wealthy take becomes a favour.” Devika

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Chapter 156 — The Debt of Donation

names this “inverted debt.” Haricharan grows increasingly uneasy. Kamla says, “The village was broken all along; it simply had no voice.” Bhanu Lal tells of a secret notebook headed “Consent,” supposedly kept in Baba's special room. Mahavir admits that an unopened iron chest stands in his home. Surmani Devi establishes “rules for the chest”: privacy, copies, witnesses and an inventory. Mahavir gathers the courage to bring it out. Satyavrat says, “The honour of a lineage does not diminish by enduring truth; it rots by covering up falsehood.” Meera concludes, “The debt of donation was not simply financial. It was a bond woven from shame, gratitude, religion, hunger, labour, reputation and fear. Next comes the examination of the

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Chapter 156 — The Debt of Donation

consent notebook and the iron chest."

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Chapter 157 — The Iron Chest

Part 2 · The Main Story

1 / 4

Mahavir Pathak and the others go upstairs to a locked room in his home to open an iron chest. The rules are read first: it will not be opened by a single person; every object will be inventoried; private matters will remain protected. Hariballabh Das shudders on seeing a broken pair of devotional cymbals resting on the chest. Meera says, “Record even where the key has been kept.” The lock opens. Inside are two registers, sealed documents, a bundle wrapped in red cloth and a copper box. The first register, “Food Distribution,” contains a column headed “Promise,” with entries such as “Will respect Baba” and “Will not raise a land dispute.” The second register, a black-bound book titled “Consent,” establishes the procedure:

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Chapter 157 — The Iron Chest

“Assurance obtained after donation/service/emergency relief.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “An assurance after emergency relief means that the emergency itself was turned into a document.” The same witness names recur: Haricharan Tiwari, Ramlakhan Sahay, Lau's accountant and Chandrapal's people. Bhikhari Lal remarks, “This is not consent; it is encirclement.” In the copper box they find a thumbprint pad, and Devika begins an inventory of its ownership. A paper concerning Phoolkali Devi reads, “Boundary dispute suspended in return for temporary shelter.” Sharda Jha testifies that Phoolkali slept in the ashram veranda after the disaster. Mahavir breaks down: “Why was I never told?” Satyavrat replies, “What a lineage leaves untold within

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Chapter 157 — The Iron Chest

itself is its real lesson.” Haricharan shouts, “Being a witness is no crime!” Aruni answers, “Being a witness is no crime, but writing consent in a time of hunger stands at the threshold of crime.” Ramlakhan comes forward, finds his name in two places—as witness and as the one who “explained”—and falters: “I thought I was explaining things. I did not understand that I was manufacturing consent.” The bundle in red cloth contains an unfinished map. The boundaries of Channa Grove, the pond and fields have been redrawn in red ink, beside a trident-like sign associated with Batuknath. Satyavrat calls it “an unsigned mark of authority.” Haricharan asks Meera mockingly whether she is afraid. She answers, “No. Unlike you, I will not

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Chapter 157 — The Iron Chest

write consent in haste.” By evening the chest is empty, but the room feels heavy. Surmani Devi warns, “The story from the belly of this chest will now enter the village's belly. Digest it slowly or it will turn poisonous.” Kamla asks when her grandmother's papers will be read. Meera says, “When you are ready, and when hearing her story will be care, not spectacle.” The emptied chest is placed beside the stump, while the consent notebook is secured separately. Those who once raised their hands only halfway have become watchkeepers.

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Chapter 158 — Comparing the Consent Notebook

Meera reads the rules: obtain each family's testimony separately, compare it with the records, prepare a list of discrepancies, and only then hold a public hearing. Satyavrat Mehta adds, “Comparison is not revenge; it is the measure of truth.” Kailash Mandal's sister Rampari explains that during their father's illness someone held his hand and pressed his thumbprint while asking him to acknowledge “Baba's grace.” No boundary dispute was mentioned. Devika writes, “Night of illness: voluntariness doubtful.” Sakuni Khatun says her mother's silence was recorded as a “village-council promise”: silence was turned into a pledge. Kamla, Phoolkali Devi's granddaughter, now comes forward ready to speak. Sharda Jha testifies that on a rainy

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Chapter 158 — Comparing the Consent Notebook

night Phoolkali sought shelter in the ashram veranda, but there was no discussion of a boundary dispute. The ledger had leapt “from an account of relief to suspension of boundary rights.” Mahavir clutches a doorpost. Hariballabh Das's father, a player of small devotional cymbals, could not read; he only knew how to sing. Satyavrat says, “Reading a name is not enough; one must read the manoeuvre.” Ramlakhan Sahay admits, “We tied people's fears into soft words.” Asked whether he knew he was applying pressure, he says, “Even when I saw their fear I said, ‘Do not be afraid; put down your thumbprint.’” Haricharan Tiwari claims he only delivered messages. Kamla answers, “Amid hunger, illness and rain, refusal was not a real option.”

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Chapter 158 — Comparing the Consent Notebook

Bhanu Lal relates something Lau's accountant had said: “Trust makes the thumbprint come quickly.” Comparison reveals an exceptionally grave case: a name bears a signature on a date when the person had already died in hospital. Satyavrat orders it specially marked. Meera says, “Putting pressure on the living is one crime; writing consent in the name of the dead is the murder of memory.” By midday eighteen names have been compared: five instances of pressure, three of silence recorded as pledges, two temporary concessions turned permanent, four recurrent witnesses, one dead person and three incomplete cases. Mahavir declares, “If a house survives on lies, it was sold long ago.” They decide to put a copy of the village's papers in a

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Chapter 158 — Comparing the Consent Notebook

public register. Surmani insists on restraint: “The method of the crime will be read, but suffering will not be made a spectacle.” At dusk Kailash, Sakuni and Kamla repeat their families' real accounts together: “We took medicine, not silence. We took grain, not the road. We took shelter, not the field.” Chandrapal's name enters every mind without being spoken; all the lines are turning toward one dark centre.

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Chapter 159 — Consent in the Name of the Dead

Meera orders the list of dead and absent people to be kept on white cloth: “Not blackening the names of the dead, but white caution.” The first case concerns Jagdish Mahto. The date in the consent notebook is twenty days later than the date in the temple's death register. His grandson Parmanand brings a brass cup used for water offerings and asks, “How did Grandfather give a thumbprint?” The second case concerns Sona Jha, whose “attendance at the ashram” was recorded although she had gone to Kashi. Her son Harinarayan's letter makes clear that she was unable to walk. Satyavrat Mehta says, “The letter records the body's incapacity; the notebook records the body's presence. That contradiction reveals a crime, not just a problem

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Chapter 159 — Consent in the Name of the Dead

with a file.” In the third case, Rukmini Devi's genuine signature, written in rounded characters, differs from the notebook's stiff, apparently male handwriting when the two are compared on a glass plate. A witness imprisoned at the time is also listed as present on the ashram veranda. The crowd grows angry, but Surmani calms them: “The network was made from paper. Tear it apart by reading, not by fighting.” An old brass-marked box is brought from Mahavir's home. It contains a donation register, a service account and a book of “Rights Notices,” with later pages cut away: the record of suppressed rights is incomplete. The book declares, “Whomever Baba gives his mark shall be regarded as a mediator in a dispute.” Aruni responds,

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Chapter 159 — Consent in the Name of the Dead

“When a mediator writes the papers, he ceases to be an arbitrator and becomes a party.” Ramlakhan Sahay admits he used to say, “It bears Baba's seal; what is the point of arguing?” In many homes he never even read the page aloud. Bhanu Lal supplies a counterfeit “shadow seal,” whose crescent-shaped corner is subtly crooked compared with the genuine seal. This crooked mark matches three of the dead people's pages. Bhikhari Lal spreads out the land maps and finds that three later sale deeds concern boundaries belonging to dead or absent persons. The buyers are Chandrapal's nephew, the accountant's brother-in-law and a partner of Lau. The trail turns toward Chandrapal's warehouse. By evening a nine-page list of consent attributed to

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Chapter 159 — Consent in the Name of the Dead

the dead has been prepared. Mahavir does not close the box; he ties it with red and white thread and places it by the stump. “Until the investigation is complete, the box will remain under the grove's watch.” Kailash, Sakuni and Kamla repeat the accounts of their families, and the chapter points toward an examination of the sale deeds, the accountant's ledger and Chandrapal's accounts.

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Chapter 160 — The Shadow of the Warehouse

The red thread tracing the benefits arising from the dead people's purported consent leads to Chandrapal's old warehouse, known in the village as “the room that swallows paper.” Ananya opens a section headed “Warehouse Comparison,” while Aruni writes four questions: “Who benefits? Who orders? Whose people? What object?” Dhiru, Lau's servant, opens the gate and says, “Master Lau said it was Chandrapal Babu's property, but I was responsible for its care.” Inside is a map on the wall whose marks correspond to the red thread from the previous day. Satyavrat Mehta says, “These are not revenue boundaries but lines of greed.” Mahavir Pathak realizes that the mark of authority from his household was placed at the points where possession

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Chapter 160 — The Shadow of the Warehouse

changed hands. Registers in a chest are headed “Arrival of Grain,” “Loan Account” and “Donation Expenditure,” with entries such as “Shadow seal: expense adjusted.” Against Jagdish Mahto's name Parmanand reads, “Service after death; stop boundary claim,” and breaks down: “Here they called even Grandfather's dead body ‘service.’” A second chest contains seals: one original, two copies and three unfinished ones. The crooked corner of the copied crescent matches marks on the dead people's documents. Behind sacks of grain, a wooden box holds pages that have been cut out, practice signatures, blank sheets already stamped, and a strip bearing thumbprints. Instead of names, it has categories such as “old,” “widow,” “away” and “dead.”

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Chapter 160 — The Shadow of the Warehouse

Surmani Devi says sternly, “Here people were reduced to even less than their names ... Categories of prey were made.” In a small rear room they find a half-attached paper from a coat pocket: “Chandrapal Babu's oral instruction: no pages are to leave,” bearing Lau's signature. Meera maintains precision: “This is a written recollection of an oral instruction. It is not Chandrapal's direct signature, but it acknowledges the instruction.” Dhiru gives a second statement: meetings took place at night in the warehouse. “They sent me to serve tea. Inside there was laughter; outside people were weeping.” Devika calls this “the moral map of the warehouse.” Ramlakhan admits that Lau used to say, “Show them the seal and they will believe. If

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Chapter 160 — The Shadow of the Warehouse

they do not, show them the debt register.” Debt, service, donation and seal were four ropes tightened around the same neck. Satyavrat trembles and admits, “What I failed to hear on the veranda of the law, this warehouse kept hearing.” By evening a preliminary inventory has been prepared. Mahavir hands the box and evidence to Meera, saying, “The seal's sanctity will be protected not by worshipping it but by revealing its misuse.” For the first time that night, Chandrapal's name is spoken in the village as a question rather than in fear: “Where is Chandrapal? Behind whom is he hiding?”

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Chapter 161 — Imprisoned by the Phone

Meera opens a new page, “Crocodiles Beyond Paper”: “The crocodile that once chewed through field boundaries now devours voices, fear and numbers.” An elderly litigant arrives in terror: “They imprisoned me inside my phone.” During the night, a caller impersonating an official ordered him not to leave his house and threatened him not to tell anyone. His grandson had recorded half the call. The voice knew the old man's case number, his land dispute, and even the dates read aloud on the veranda. Devika says, “The testimony of the sack of discarded papers has become a trap on the telephone.” The caller demanded money in a “safe account.” Half the amount had already been transferred before the grandson stopped the transaction that

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Chapter 161 — Imprisoned by the Phone

morning. Ananya makes four columns: fear, information, money and the performance of a voice. Satyavrat Mehta remarks, “Behind this voice there is more than a city swindler. It carries the smell of the records room.” A clerk admits that people had been photographing documents there on mobile phones, allegedly under “orders from above.” Dhiru recognizes one brief vocal sound as that of Madhukar, a man who used to drink tea in Lau's warehouse. The connection Lau–Chandrapal–warehouse–telephone begins to emerge. Meera lays down rules: no one should answer such calls alone, reveal confidential numbers or transfer money without understanding why. Sakuni questions Haricharan Tiwari's eagerness to blame the city. The old man's phone rings

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Chapter 161 — Imprisoned by the Phone

again. On speaker, Meera asks the caller to identify his branch, position and written authorization. The voice falters and disconnects. For the first time the old man stands upright: “I was imprisoned in my phone; now the voice has fled.” Bhikhari Lal finds Madhukar Prasad's name three times in the records-room visitor register, connected with Lau, Haricharan and “Chandrapal Babu's representative.” Ananya adds three new ends to the red thread: phone, bank and Madhukar. “Land fraud and phone fraud are not two separate rivers, but two bends in the same black current.” Mahavir Pathak says that while learning to forge seals, the perpetrators learned to put a seal upon voices as well. By evening each hamlet establishes a new watch of

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Chapter 161 — Imprisoned by the Phone

two children and two adults. Setting his phone on the stump, the old man says, “Last night this became my prison; now it will become testimony.” News then comes that Madhukar Prasad has disappeared. His room contains telephone numbers, case numbers and repeated references to “C. Babu.” Meera cautions: “News is not testimony, but it can be smoke leading toward testimony.”

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Chapter 162 — The Seal of a Voice

The first meeting about telephones takes place beside Channa Grove in the morning; elderly residents bring their handsets. Meera explains: “When a voice calls itself the government, the court, the police, a bank, religion, a doctor or a guru, and claims authority over a person's judgment, it affixes the seal of a voice.” Aruni writes, “Seal of a voice = imitation of trust.” Bhikhari Lal remembers Madhukar using the pretext of examining case files to measure people's vulnerabilities. Ananya opens a register called “Voice-Trap Records.” Calls supposedly from the electricity department, “bank security” and the police station turn out to use the same tactics. Sakuni testifies that she saw Haricharan's men going into Madhukar's locked

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Chapter 162 — The Seal of a Voice

room during the day. Meera insists: “Write what was seen; keep conjecture separate.” In Madhukar's room they find a calendar with three dates circled in red, matching entries in the records-room visitor register. Below are the words “old, son away, field, account.” Surmani Devi says, “This is not a description of human beings. It is a measure of prey.” Beneath the bed lies a bag containing rehearsed threats—“Begin with fear of arrest,” “Keep them alone”—and a recorder used for practicing voices. Haricharan Tiwari arrives protesting that the village's reputation will be damaged. Meera asks, “Is a village disgraced by its fear or by the crime?” Satyavrat places the calendar dates before him: “A shadow is not proof, but it gives

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Chapter 162 — The Seal of a Voice

direction.” By evening the bank reports that half the elderly man's money left in three transfers, one to an account named “M. Prasad Service Centre.” Madhukar's initial has surfaced again. That night the old man himself reads the scripted threats, while children identify the tactic behind each: “Hurry” means time pressure; “Tell no one” means isolation. The village adopts a new pledge: every threatening phone call must be heard by at least three pairs of ears. Haricharan slips away from the crowd and mutters into his phone, “Remove the papers.” Sakuni overhears and tells Meera. Satyavrat orders four copies of every item found in the room, to be kept at Channa Grove, the records room, with Surmani Devi and in the children's

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Chapter 162 — The Seal of a Voice

register. Finally Meera declares, “Where fear is alone, the crocodile hides. Where fear is spoken of, its skin begins to peel away.” The village is learning not merely to hear voices but to open them up and read them.

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Chapter 163 — The Trace of the Removed Papers

At dawn Bhikhari Lal notices fresh scratches on the lock's hasp. Meera says, “Papers can be stolen, but footprints in dust can also testify.” A strip of dust beneath cupboard number seventeen has been disturbed, with the mark of a bare foot. An empty loop of cord remains: the document has vanished, but the cord survives. Faint pressure marks, “Pa...ma...,” appear at the corner of the visitor register and suggest the name of a new clerk, Parmanand. He initially denies everything, but faced with the evidence admits, “They said there were orders from above. The person who told me was one of Haricharan Babu's people, but the voice on the phone claimed to be Chandrapal Babu's office.” Behind a shelf they find a carbon impression

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Chapter 163 — The Trace of the Removed Papers

bearing the phrases “death certificate attached,” “heir absent” and the blurred mark “M. Prasad Service.” The person recorded as dead is, in fact, the living Nageshwar Jha; the elderly litigant confirms this immediately. Satyavrat Mehta is stunned: “A death certificate for a living person! That opens every road to land, bank accounts and inheritance.” Meera sends one team to Nageshwar's home and another to the bank. Sakuni meets the old man, who asks, “Who wrote ‘dead’ against the name of a man who can still hear his name?” His wife retrieves the land register and bank passbook from an old chest. At the bank the manager initially pleads confidentiality, but after Satyavrat makes a written request the team learns of small,

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Chapter 163 — The Trace of the Removed Papers

repeated transactions through an outside payment centre named “M. Prasad Service.” Devika says, “This crocodile does not eat a body in one mouthful. It bites away small pieces so that the pain is recognized late.” Four documents are placed beside Channa Grove that evening. Haricharan does not attend; Meera writes only “Haricharan absent.” At night Ananya discovers “17/C” on the carbon impression. Aruni asks whether it points to cupboard seventeen and “C. Babu.” At the riverbank a crocodile appears, half in water and half in mud, with lines across its hide like torn marks on paper. Surmani Devi says, “A living name can tear open the crocodile's belly and come out.”

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Chapter 164 — Inside Chandrapal's Shadow

Meera announces, “Today we are not looking into Chandrapal's home. We are looking into the belly of his shadow.” Satyavrat Mehta arranges five documents in sequence: “If we follow the order, the net will speak.” In the old alphabetical arrangement of the records office, section “17/C” stores disputed inheritance and death-certificate documents—a corridor of murderous paperwork. Parmanand is questioned again, this time seated. Meera explains that keeping a person already collapsing with fear on his feet may drive him to seek refuge in a lie. Parmanand says the caller began to say “C section,” suddenly fell silent, and another whisper could be heard: “Don't say the name. Don't say C.” Sakuni brings a receipt from Nageshwar's home

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Chapter 164 — Inside Chandrapal's Shadow

headed “Chandrapal Consultancy Centre”; two people had already visited offering “document verification assistance.” An old clerk admits that Chandrapal's office has a “C Room,” where intermediaries for mortgage papers, verification, pensions, death certificates and land measurement gather. “Everyone knew, but knowing never became public truth.” Surmani introduces a new rule: “'Everyone knows' will no longer remain outside the register.” The team goes to Chandrapal's office. Inside C Room they find three desks—for forms, seals and a computer. Beside the computer is a notice: “Identification required to verify dead/alive status.” In a drawer they find empty envelopes printed “M. Prasad Service.” An employee calls them materials

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Chapter 164 — Inside Chandrapal's Shadow

belonging to an outside agency, and Meera asks why an outside agency's envelopes are kept in an inside drawer. Satyavrat directs everyone not to touch the computer: “What remains untouched may yet survive.” On the wall hangs a predatory map marking old people's homes, sons living away, couples living alone and mortgaged land. Surmani says, “They have made not a service but a hunting ground.” Haricharan arrives angrily, alleging illegal entry. Meera asks which provision of the law permits a death certificate to be manufactured for a living person. Chandrapal himself is absent, although a half-finished cup of tea remains: “The absent sometimes announce their presence with half-drunk tea.” Two elderly women waiting in the lobby

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Chapter 164 — Inside Chandrapal's Shadow

speak of threats to cut off their pensions and remove their names. At dusk all the evidence is read beside Channa Grove, without pronouncing a verdict—only the sequence, though the sequence itself begins to sound like a judgment. A whirlpool forms in the river at night. “Now we are measuring its belly,” says Surmani. Chandrapal has not been found, but his shadow has been caught.

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Chapter 165 — The Body of the Shadow

Ananya writes, “The search for the body begins with the shadow.” Meera cautions, “There will be no raid on a house today. We are looking not simply for a person but for the body of a system.” Satyavrat Mehta suggests that “C” may designate a room, section, code or initial. The team goes to the back alley of the office, where a dusty “Storage Room” door bears a conspicuous C. Parmanand says nobody enters directly: papers used to emerge from the room, while empty envelopes went back inside. Surmani Devi comments, “When an empty envelope is called heavy, you know it carries the weight of an invisible bribe.” Nageshwar Jha—the living “dead man”—arrives and points out a ventilator: “They declared me dead once, but the dead hear a

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Chapter 165 — The Body of the Shadow

great deal.” Looking through it, they see “C-17” written on a white-striped chest. Ananya realizes that “17/C” has appeared in reverse order. Meera refuses to break the door: “We shall read names outside it, and call out the names of whatever lies inside.” Names are recited in the alley. At the third mention of Madhukar Prasad something falls within. A child brings a receipt found in Madhukar's room: “Transport: four chests; night watch; destination—C warehouse,” dated around the preparation of Nageshwar's false death certificate. Parmanand identifies a man working for Chandrapal: Dharni Mahto, formerly a scrap dealer. Surmani says, “Not a scrap dealer, but a buyer of the bones of names.” Near an old weighing scale they find

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Chapter 165 — The Body of the Shadow

paper fibres and a scrap bearing “Original copy preserved.” Satyavrat concludes that the original chest may have survived somewhere. Meera decides that three copies of the register will be secured at Channa Grove, with Satyavrat and in a widow's home. “Weakness can be the safest veil.” By evening an elderly boatman says Dharni was seen carrying chests at night to a half-sunken storehouse at old Tetari Ghat on the far side of the river, where lantern light has been observed. Ananya writes, “Tetari Ghat: possible C warehouse.” Meera halts any night investigation: “We will go in daylight.” At the end a crocodile lies motionless on the riverbank facing the ghat. Satyavrat warns, “We will not write down the crocodile's signal. We will

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Chapter 165 — The Body of the Shadow

record the boatman's statement.”

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Chapter 166 — The Storehouse at Tamarind Ghat

At dawn the whole village sets out toward Tetari Ghat. Satyavrat Mehta repeats the rule: “Whatever we find must be observed before it is lifted, and identified before it is observed.” Surmani Devi carries a packet of salt for examining how long moisture has been present. On the path they find drag marks left by heavy chests—not fresh, but made after the rain. A rusted lock hangs on the old storehouse. The elderly boatman testifies that he twice saw a lantern there at night during the previous month; no boat pulled up to the ghat, but someone crossed the water downstream. With a village-council witness present, the lock is opened. Inside are damp papers, old sacks and a chest marked “C-17” in red chalk. Opening it layer by layer,

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Chapter 166 — The Storehouse at Tamarind Ghat

they find Nageshwar Jha's original mortgage deed, a draft statement by Dharni Mahto and land-consent papers for two widows, their signatures apparently made by the same hand. Two elderly women recognize errors in the spelling of their names and in the supposed thumbprint records. Ananya notes, “Wrong spelling: counterfeit intimacy.” A plastic box contains predatory notes about older residents: “alone,” “son away,” “easily frightened.” Aruni is furious, but Meera says, “Loneliness is not an opportunity for crime; it is a failure of society.” A drawer contains a voice recorder and scripted telephone threats, including “Your Aadhaar has been found misused.” An iron box is hidden in the rear wall. Inside are five ledgers wrapped in

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Chapter 166 — The Storehouse at Tamarind Ghat

red cloth: names and sums; indicators of fear; a symbol code (Ka, Kha, C, Go, I, with I signifying Tetari Ghat); a list of names marked “ready to declare dead”; and a fifth ledger reading, “New voice list prepared; next consignment: across the river.” Haricharan Tiwari arrives only after the chest has been opened and raises an objection. Satyavrat says, “You came late, but spoke at precisely the right moment.” When Meera asks him about “C-17 chest,” “ready to declare dead” and “new voice list,” he remains silent on all three. Devika distinguishes three shades of this silence: self-defence, fear and connection. The storehouse is collectively sealed at dusk. At night the contents of all five ledgers are described at Channa Grove,

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Chapter 166 — The Storehouse at Tamarind Ghat

with the victims' privacy protected. The river is quiet and the crocodile does not appear. Surmani says, “Its belly is opening. What has come out as a ledger cannot be digested again.”

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Chapter 167 — The Voice Across the River

Part 2 · The Main Story

Meera tells the team to cross the river in an orderly fashion, not as a procession. Satyavrat Mehta says, “They used to make counterfeit copies of papers; now they manufacture the false presence of a voice.” Aruni classifies sound evidence under body, time, sequence, transactions and silence. While the boat is crossing, Aruni receives an unknown call: “Your name is under investigation. Tell no one.” Meera signals him to put it on speaker for everyone to hear. When Aruni asks, “Who is my father?”, the voice falls silent. Devika records, “Pause at a family name: the list is incomplete.” On the opposite bank, in the home of Madhukant Jha and Kamla Devi, the elderly woman tearfully recalls that a false version of her son's voice

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Chapter 167 — The Voice Across the River

called the previous day, ordering her not to speak to anyone. Her husband explains, “It sounded like our son, but it did not breathe like him. Our son laughs now and then as he speaks. This voice only frightened us.” Money left in three stages—a small amount, a medium amount and finally their entire savings. Satyavrat says, “The lock of trust is first opened with a small key.” A young man named Naval, attempting to flee behind the house, is caught. His pocket holds two SIM cards and notes such as “Mother will weep” and “Father will break quickly.” Naval tries three successive defences: ignorance, restricted responsibility and distance from the act. He had worked at a “Public Service Centre” across the river. The centre is sealed;

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Chapter 167 — The Voice Across the River

it contains Aadhaar copies, pension-account details and voice samples marked “son, police, bank, customs, court.” A sheet near the microphone reads, “Mother, hurry, I'm trapped!” Kamla Devi cries out, “Those were his very words!” Meera replies, “It is no longer his sentence; it is evidence.” Naval admits, “I only forwarded data.” Satyavrat responds sternly, “You were not sending data. You were sending a household's breath.” The centre is sealed by evening. At night Kamla's actual son calls from far away on the boatman's phone and reassures his mother. Surmani Devi scatters salt from her packet upon the earth: “Dry out the dampness of the voice.” At the end, only the glowing ears—not the face—of the old ghost appear. The voice

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Chapter 167 — The Voice Across the River

across the river has been caught, but the true throat behind it is still far away.

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Chapter 168 — The City's Throat

Meera asks, “A machine can produce a false voice, but where did it obtain information about the right household, the right old age and the right land dispute?” Ananya writes, “The throat belongs to the city; the names belong to the village; between them runs a broker's road.” Naresh, an employee of the Public Service Centre, comes trembling to confess that two years earlier a man representing “M. Services” offered to clean the system free of charge. On that pretext he scanned old papers and carried copies to the city without permission. A receipt mentioned “Madhukar's associate.” Bhikhari Lal finds a sheet in Naresh's bag headed “Village Contact List: Senior Citizens First.” Surmani Devi says, “They saw prey, not the elderly.”

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Chapter 168 — The City's Throat

The group decides to go to the city, while Surmani stays behind to guard the village. At the address Naresh supplies they find an office called “Mitra Data Solutions,” formerly “M. Services.” Within, recordings blend with live voices, including a warning that “a warrant has been issued against you.” The elderly litigant recognizes one voice: “The throat that imprisoned me is here.” Bhikhari Lal sees a box marked “C-Group: Rural Elderly,” recalling C Room at the court-related office. A young man acting as a watchman for the absent owner emerges and invokes privacy. Meera replies, “Privacy is the victim's right, not the criminal's shield.” The old litigant recognizes the pattern of breathing in the voice. Beneath a desk are

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Chapter 168 — The City's Throat

registers titled “Voice Batch 3” and “Village Story Cues.” Their existence is recorded in front of witnesses, but they are not opened. The local police initially try to dismiss it as an ordinary cybercrime. Satyavrat's ordered account, however, establishes the pattern of an organized theft of identities. A computer displays the line “Chandra 2: old file active.” Satyavrat warns that Chandra 2 could be Chandrapal—or could be someone else: conjecture must not become a decision. In the evening the team returns to the village. Meera says, “In the city we found the throat, found half the body, and saw the shadow turn back toward the name Chandra.” On the riverbank the crocodile faces the city, its tail resting in village mud. The

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Chapter 168 — The City's Throat

criminal body seems divided between two places. The next door in the story is marked “Chandra 2.”

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Chapter 169 — The Door of Chandra Two

The name “Chandra 2” hangs in everyone's mind throughout the night. Meera observes, “A crime wishing to hide its old face often keeps half a name, to remain recognizable and still evade capture.” From the inventory of seized items Devika selects a third address, “Chandra Service Office,” behind the city's old vegetable market. Inside a crowd of elderly people waits while a clerk whispers, “Tell no one at home or your work will be stopped.” Satyavrat labels this “manufacturing isolation: the crime's first act.” Ananya sees a file headed “Elderly Assistance, Land Disputes, Sons Abroad,” with a column for “emotional cues,” including “mother cries quickly” and “widow insecure about land.” Seated behind the counter, Chandramohan calls

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Chapter 169 — The Door of Chandra Two

himself a charitable worker, but he reacts even before Meera mentions “Chandra 2,” arousing suspicion. A drawer contains a seal, blank stamp papers and two mobiles with contacts named “C-Group,” “Madhukar” and “Chandra 1.” In the rear room they find a voice recorder and a list, “Using Names of Old Trust”: Batuk Babu, Panditji, Uncle Chandrapal and Court Babu. Chandrapal's name has been used as counterfeit currency of credibility in threatening calls. Outside, the crowd gathers and tells its stories of fraud; Meera refuses to let a crowd pronounce judgment. A voice message on the second mobile declares, “Whoever has been eaten by the courts will be eaten quickly by the phone.” Satyavrat understands that the crime is not merely a

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Chapter 169 — The Door of Chandra Two

product of new technology; it is interest charged on old injustice. Under pressure Chandramohan admits that lists came from above and he did not work alone. Asked who “above” means, he finally says, “Chandra 1.” Bhikhari Lal finds a ledger called “Old Trust List,” where the Channa Grove area is marked in red. Ananya is shaken: “They were reading us long before we began reading them.” Meera seals the ledger and a notice saying “Under Investigation” is fixed to the office. At the evening public reading beside Channa Grove, she explains that a crime may wear a person's face, but its body is formed from papers, voices, fear, services, pensions, courts and banks. Scattering salt, Surmani says, “We have found Chandra Two. Now find

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Chapter 169 — The Door of Chandra Two

Chandra One.” At the end only the crocodile's eyes shine above the river water. Ananya writes, “Chandra 2 has been opened; Chandra 1 remains inside the darkness.”

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Chapter 170 — Opening the Shell of Chandra One

Meera cautions, “We must open the shell of a name, not worship the name.” In the “Old Trust List,” Satyavrat reads “First filter: families awaiting justice.” He says, “The real handcuffs of digital arrest are not in the mobile phone; they are in old fear.” Chandramohan admits that lists, voice samples and scripted lines all arrived from outside and that he never asked questions. Bhikhari Lal replies, “The person who does not ask becomes a partner in the answer.” One page of the ledger bears just four words: “Chandra 1: paternal voice.” Satyavrat begins to see that this may be no single individual but an audible disguise constructed from words such as father, uncle, babu, pandit and court. The ledger gives an address: Room Seven,

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Chapter 170 — Opening the Shell of Chandra One

Old Typists' Lane. There they find the elderly typist Mohanlal Jha with stamps, a scanner and a microphone on his table. One sheet is headed “Five Stages of Pressure on a Mother's Mind”: isolate her, recall an old case, use her child's name, speak with authority and demand money immediately. Devika calls it “a school for crime.” Aruni reads Kamla Devi's testimony aloud and Mohanlal breaks down: “I did not know people were being shattered so badly.” A red file labelled “C-One” contains recordings from an old pandit's sermons, court announcements, a bank manager's speech and parts of Chandrapal's earlier public addresses. The meaning of “Chandra 1” becomes clear: a composite mask made from voices that once carried authority.

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Chapter 170 — Opening the Shell of Chandra One

Satyavrat says, “Whether Chandrapal is alive or dead, the force of his voice still binds people.” Mohanlal explains, “Names are sold, Babu. A voice resembling a name before which people bow fetches a higher price.” Meera answers, “When prestige becomes a shield for injustice, it is more dangerous even than the dead.” Mohanlal finally admits that Chandramohan, a bank intermediary, an old stamp writer and Madhukar Babu were part of the network. Madhukar used to say, “The old grove area first.” Once more the thread returns to Channa Grove. Room Seven is sealed that evening, but Meera publicly reads out the entire method used in the fraud. Surmani says, “Once a spell is understood, half its terror dies.” A warning, rather than a

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Chapter 170 — Opening the Shell of Chandra One

name, is fixed to the stump. Kamla Devi and other women tell their experiences of fraud together. The net of digital arrest begins to tear under the weight of collective speech. Satyavrat writes, “When a community begins to listen, the false voice cracks.” Meera adds, “Listening is protection.” At the end a crocodile breaks the moon's reflection in the river into pieces that separate and reunite. Ananya writes, “Chandra One is no person but the false light of authority. Its shell has opened, but the real night remains.”

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Chapter 171 — Channa Grove's Invisible Court

Meera announces, “No government verdict will be delivered here. Names will be heard, fears will be heard, and the silence of those who do not wish to speak will be recorded as well.” Ananya makes a circle of red thread by the stump's roots and sets out three stones labelled name, fear and testimony. Kamla Devi testifies first: “The criminal demanded my silence, not my son's safety.” Silence was the swindler's first cell. Farmer Lakshman Yadav describes changes to his land map: “When the land shrinks on paper, the farmer's chest shrinks too.” A young migrant says, “I called my mother less often, while the fraudster called her more. When a home's real voice becomes distant, a false voice moves into its place.” Shivanarayan Mishra,

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Chapter 171 — Channa Grove's Invisible Court

an old stamp writer, admits helping Mohanlal draft threatening scripts. As penance he offers to prepare a “protection letter” containing safety instructions in everyday language. An unnamed veiled woman says that after her husband died, a bank intermediary demanded her signature and threatened that otherwise her daughter's wedding would be stopped. The children write “pressure at the threshold” instead of her name. Devika says, “In the criminal records of many women's lives there is no name, only a thumbprint—and in fact that thumbprint is the imprint of pressure.” Aruni summarizes the method in four words: isolation, authority, haste and silence. “Together these four form the crocodile's mouth.” Entering the circle, Satyavrat

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Chapter 171 — Channa Grove's Invisible Court

Mehta says, “Fear repeated throughout society is itself the beginning of evidence.” Bhikhari Lal ties his key to the red thread and hangs it on the stump: “This is not the key to a file. It is the key to being heard.” By evening Madhukar Babu's name arises again. Fifteen years earlier he came on a village survey and was seen with Chandrapal's old associates. Meera repeats that evidence must be distinguished from rumour. Ananya distributes three colours of thread: red for what a person saw, yellow for what was heard and black for fear or supposition. By evening there is little red, more yellow and more black than either. Devika says, “Our society has accumulated more fear than evidence.” Walking home, Kamla holds her phone openly:

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Chapter 171 — Channa Grove's Invisible Court

“If fear comes over the phone again, I will first call the watchkeepers of names.” That night Satyavrat writes, “No verdict, but the grammar of fear has been opened; no judge, but a collective ear.” At the end a bird entangles yellow thread among the black on the stump. The crocodile lies still in the water, its darkness seeming to recede before the light of the names, although the river is not yet peaceful. Madhukar's shadow advances in a clearer direction.

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Chapter 172 — Reading the Knots

On the following day the reading of knots begins. Meera explains the categories: red for what was seen, yellow for what was heard and black for fear within. Ananya sets out three baskets. “We will untie a knot only when the person speaking says that fear has loosened.” Aruni reads the first red knot, concerning Lakshman Yadav's field measurements. The documents contradict one another. Satyavrat Mehta says, “Courts compare such papers after years; a community can compare them today.” The second red knot concerns the contested thumbprint of an elderly woman admitted to hospital. The dates match, but the times differ: the shadow of crime is dense here. There are many more yellow knots—stories about Madhukar's survey visit and

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Chapter 172 — Reading the Knots

reports that he was seen with Chandrapal's people. Meera asks after each: “Did you see it? Who told you? Do you remember the date?” Shivanarayan Mishra brings his “protection letter,” written in simple language: when told to tell no one, tell someone; when asked for immediate payment, stop; verify independently with the real police station. Kamla Devi adds that mothers should agree beforehand on a private code word with their children. The black knots hold only shadows, with no dates or names. A young man says, “No one called me, but my body trembles as soon as I hear the word police.” Meera replies, “That is not merely an individual's fear; it is history's surviving tremor.” Satyavrat writes, “When the language of the state

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Chapter 172 — Reading the Knots

accumulates as fear, criminals sell its counterfeit shadow.” Bhikhari Lal compares the black knots to dust: “Sweep it gently; strike at it and the letters will fly away.” Meera decides to prepare a “map of fear.” A little boy, Phulesar, asks what colour should be assigned to his father's threat, “Study or you will have to work as a labourer.” Devika replies, “It is black, and also red.” Before dusk the elderly panchayat worker Ramkeval Paswan arrives with a fifteen-year-old register bearing the clear signature “Madhukar Mishra, Special Survey Assistant.” Ramkeval says the survey had marked elderly, widowed and migrant households. Meera makes a copy and secures the original. Ananya ties a new, weighty knot of red thread: “Madhukar

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Chapter 172 — Reading the Knots

Babu has moved out of shadow and onto the page.” A crocodile moves restlessly in the river; the red thread trembles without breaking. Satyavrat writes, “Red is the beginning of truth, yellow the road of memory, black the mine of fear. The criminal will not be found without all three.” The register introduces a new danger: once a name appears on paper, someone will surely try to make that page disappear.

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Chapter 173 — Guarding the Register

Ramkeval Paswan brings the register safely in a bag. Meera announces, “Not testimony first today, but protection. We will make three copies.” On an empty envelope Satyavrat Mehta writes, “Ramkeval's register: original seen, copy made, protection begun.” Bhikhari Lal demonstrates proper care for archival documents. Beside “Special Attention,” the register lists house names, field numbers, case status and marks identifying widows, the elderly and debtors. Ramkeval explains, “Madhukar Babu said it was so government benefits could reach them. Later they received not benefits, but notices, telephone calls and threats of mortgage.” Devika writes, “A list made to provide benefits, if left unguarded, can become a criminal weapon.”

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Chapter 173 — Guarding the Register

Satyavrat starts comparing its dates with court files. A young man called Neelmani proposes password-protected computer scans. At noon Dhruvesh, an associate of Chandrapal, arrives and presses them to deposit the register in the panchayat office. Meera's sequence of questions undermines his demand. When Dhruvesh extends his hand toward the papers, Bhikhari Lal stops him: “Write your name before touching a document.” Ananya declares, “If a page carries my name, my land, my thumbprint and my fear, I have a right to guard it.” The crowd echoes, “Our right!” Dhruvesh leaves with a threat: “Keep your papers safe tonight.” Meera immediately arranges guards at three locations. At midnight an unfamiliar shadow moves along the wall near

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Chapter 173 — Guarding the Register

Devika's house. Phulesar, a child, gives a signal with pebbles; Bhikhari Lal, Ananya and Aruni rush there. The shadow escapes, leaving a threatening note: “Open old matters and a new case will be made against you.” Satyavrat treats the note not only as a threat but also as a kind of admission. Meera says, “A threat is not evidence's enemy; it is evidence's shadow. Once we record it, it becomes the criminal's footprint.” By morning the register remains safe, along with its copies and the threatening slip. The guards are exhausted but stand upright. They have been guarding more than paper: memory, courage and the rebirth of a community.

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Chapter 174 — At the Threshold of the Invisible Court

Part 2 · The Main Story

A circle forms around the stump of Channa Grove, and people enter without being summoned, taking off their shoes. Ananya lays down an empty sheet: “Today we will write what was contained in papers but could never become a document.” Aruni arranges ten stones: name, body, water, land, paper, fear, silence, waiting, entrapment and memory. Sona, a daughter-in-law, was recorded as “absent” for years although she attended every hearing. “I was present; only those who occupied the chairs meant to see me were absent.” Meera records this under “bodily presence.” Elderly litigant Bholaram describes twenty-three years of waiting by recounting the events of his family's life: “The verdict was written upon my body.” A young man tells his

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Chapter 174 — At the Threshold of the Invisible Court

father's experience of digital arrest. Devika writes, “A counterfeit seal made of a voice.” An old woman known as “Silent Auntie” says her name was misspelled three times in government records. The crowd repeats her correct name aloud three times; Meera notes, “Remembering a name is the first step toward justice.” Ramballabh, a records-room clerk, places his secret notebook on a stone: “Write the name, but write the fear as well.” Ananya records, “Clerk Ramballabh: afraid, but present.” An unnamed supporter of Chandrapal questions the court's legal validity. Satyavrat Mehta replies, “Legal value can be examined later. Humanity is measuring value now.” The person refuses to give his name; Meera records, “Anonymous objection:

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Chapter 174 — At the Threshold of the Invisible Court

confidence in the seal, distrust of the human being.” At dusk Ananya writes, “Today's proceedings neither concluded nor adjourned; preserved in public memory.” The stone called “name” is left permanently beside the stump's roots as a watchkeeper. Looking back at night, Bholaram sees a faint glow upon it. The wind opens the first page of Ramballabh's notebook, revealing the name of the person who actually carried Batuknath Hariharan's seal. The invisible court is moving beyond the victims' stories toward the door of the crime's own household.

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Chapter 175 — The Name of the Seal-Bearer

In the morning Ramballabh's notebook reveals “Deenbandhu Jha, seal-bearer,” with a note connecting him to Batuknath Hariharan's personal seal, mortgage documents and a list. Meera proceeds carefully: “We have found a name, not an accusation. We will listen, not shout.” Satyavrat Mehta remembers Deenbandhu as a thin, quiet man who carried seals and ink in a cloth bag. Ananya opens a page headed “Role of the Seal-Bearer,” with three categories: seen, heard and verified. Kamla Devi testifies that her brother-in-law's thumbprint on a mortgage deed was accompanied by Deenbandhu's red-wax seal, assumed at the time to be official. Ramkeval Paswan's register shows a partial seal beside “Special Attention.” Satyavrat says, “A partial

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Chapter 175 — The Name of the Seal-Bearer

impression can speak more loudly; a complete seal displays legitimacy, but a partial one betrays the haste of theft.” Deenbandhu's son Shashibhushan arrives to object to his father's name being raised. Reassured by Meera's explanation, he brings his late father's possessions: a cloth, stamp pad, brass seal and diary. “They lay in the room after Father died. I brought them because I heard his name.” The brass seal carries part of the name “Hariharan Seva Niketan.” The diary has dates, names and signs such as “red,” “black,” “three copies,” “B. H.” and “Ch. Pa.” Meera insists that hints are directions, not proof. Aruni compares its dates with Ramkeval's register and finds several correspondences; Neelmani arranges scans. Dhruvesh

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Chapter 175 — The Name of the Seal-Bearer

returns, trying to intimidate Shashibhushan: selling the old objects would have been simpler, he says, and these people will disgrace his father. Meera reassures him: “Disgrace falls on the person who hides the truth.” Handing the box of seals to Meera, Shashibhushan says, “If Father was only a tool, write that. If he acted knowingly, write that too. But do not write a lie.” Satyavrat tells Dhruvesh that memory is not unlawful and intimidation is an old criminal method. Bhikhari Lal records Dhruvesh in the visitor list. By evening the initial examination of Deenbandhu's seal is complete, with no verdict: the questions of how many papers bore the seal and who “B. H.” and “Ch. Pa.” signify remain. Ananya adds a stone marked “seal.”

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Chapter 175 — The Name of the Seal-Bearer

“A name belongs to a person, a seal to trust. When a seal deceives, people begin to lose their names.” Before dawn the wind opens a diary page bearing just “Final List,” beside the date of Batuknath Hariharan's service ceremony when poor families' names were read aloud from the stage.

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Chapter 176 — The Darkness of the Service Ceremony

The “Final List” page is opened at Channa Grove. Beside the names appear signs such as “beneficiary,” “applicant,” “hold” and “two copies.” Bholaram regrets having applauded at the ceremony; his applause now pricks him like a thorn. Meera says, “If service swallows land, names and rights through paperwork, it cannot be called service.” Satyavrat Mehta compares the diary dates with the register and finds an unusual number of copies prepared during the week of the ceremony. Clerk Ramballabh admits that pages were replaced behind the stage: “Deenbandhu Jha applied seals; Chandrapal checked the list.” Kamla Devi brings a counterfeit medal, a certificate and two photographs from the ceremony. Batuknath Hariharan is shown wearing a

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Chapter 176 — The Darkness of the Service Ceremony

garland, and Kamla's brother-in-law is shown affixing his thumbprint. Neelmani documents the photographs respectfully. Bhikhari Lal remembers seeing the stage covering in a sack in the records room, and the group divides into two teams. By afternoon they find the dirty red-bordered cloth, marked with wax, spilled ink and fingerprints. Satyavrat says, “This is not rubbish, but the skin of the stage on which the crime was performed.” Bholaram's wife Shanti testifies that women were made to stand separately and affix thumbprints for what was described as a “Women's Assistance Scheme.” They never received the papers at home. Meera says, “Where a woman's signature is taken without her being able to read the words, the path opens not

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Chapter 176 — The Darkness of the Service Ceremony

to charity but dispossession.” From the bottom of Deenbandhu's box Shashibhushan retrieves a slip: “After the stage reading, replace the original; obtain the signal from B. H.” Satyavrat points out that instructions to replace originals reveal the crime's structure. Ananya opens a new heading, “Public Reading and Private Records.” That evening two of Dhruvesh's men circle outside the grove on a motorcycle; Sona records the time and description. A night comparison shows the language of donation and that of seizure running alongside each other on the same dates. Bholaram says, “They read my name on the stage and closed the mouth of my papers.” Ananya writes “Light of the Stage” on a stone, so people will remember how even

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Chapter 176 — The Darkness of the Service Ceremony

illumination can sometimes perform the work of darkness. Shashibhushan signs the slip and writes, “I am handing this over voluntarily.” Meera tells him that anyone who brings a lamp out of the darkness of his own home should be called a witness, not a criminal. At the end the wind turns another diary page: “Collect papers from the homes of those whose names were announced from the stage.” The next day's house-to-house work is foreshadowed.

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Chapter 177 — Documents from House to House

Meera announces, “The names read from the stage will now be heard in their own homes. We can decide nothing without comparing the stage's voice with the household's papers.” Ananya forms three teams, warning, “In the name of seeking truth, we must not plunder another person's privacy.” At the first house, Shanti, Bholaram's wife, takes a document marked “voluntary consent” from a brass box. She had in fact put her thumbprint only to obtain help through the “Women's Assistance Scheme”: “They said assistance, but wrote consent.” At the next home the elderly Subhadra Jha has a document reading “consent with all rights.” Satyavrat Mehta says, “When the language of law is read in darkness, it becomes a weapon. The thumbprint may be

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Chapter 177 — Documents from House to House

genuine while the meaning constructed from it is false.” At Chamru Mahto's house the same name has been written four different ways in four documents. Aruni opens a page labelled “confusion of names.” Meera repeats that affixing one's thumbprint to an incomprehensible document is not a crime; it is evidence of helplessness. A message comes from Deenbandhu's household. His widow Ragini Devi makes her first public admission: “Deenbandhu did not understand everything. Toward the end he was frightened of everyone.” From beneath a pillow she retrieves a page with an incomplete signature: “Keep the original upstairs; do not give a copy.” Ragini insists, “Write as much of his fault as there was, and as much of his fear too.” At another

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Chapter 177 — Documents from House to House

house a former volunteer, Lalit, first resists, then admits that Chandrapal ordered that “the complete records shall remain with the organizing committee.” Satyavrat says, “Crime is becoming not merely a person's act but a method.” The teams return to the grove at dusk. A space is left in the middle for Chamru Mahto: “I am just one person, but in papers I have been broken into four pieces.” Meera reads a seven-point account of the work. Asked by Bhikhari Lal, clerk Ramballabh reveals the secret of the “upper room”: a room over the old courthouse where boxes of closed files were stored, with the key always in the hands of Chandrapal's people. Original papers are returned to their owners after authorized copies have been made.

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Chapter 177 — Documents from House to House

Meera says, “The first place for safeguarding a document is in its owner's hands.” Finally Ananya opens a new register heading: “The Upper Room.” That is the story's next direction.

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Chapter 178 — The Upper Room

News of “the upper room”—a locked chamber by the roof of the old courthouse—spreads through the village like fire. Bhikhari Lal says, “The key that jingled every day gave people confidence; the key that was kept silent opened the real door.” Meera sets a rule: “We will open the room, but we will not plunder it.” Three seal marks appear on the door: court, tehsil and private service committee. The lock is broken in the presence of panchayat witnesses and the hinge sheds rust. Inside are iron boxes, chests and bundles; shelves bear labels such as “Ceremony Records,” “Voluntary Letters” and “Original Copies.” The first box contains a separate page titled “Transfer of All Rights,” on which a thumbprint impression has been matched to

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Chapter 178 — The Upper Room

the place of an original signature. Meera says, “The thumbprint is not speaking here; a lie has been made to speak through it.” Clerk Ramballabh admits that Chandrapal held the register for the upper room. A second chest contains a photograph showing the paper in Kamla Devi's hand labelled “Acceptance of Assistance,” whereas the corresponding file says “Renunciation of Rights.” The photograph has become a direct witness. A third bundle, tied with red thread, contains women's applications marked “husband absent,” “widow” and “illiterate.” Papers marked “explained” have only initials, not the names of those who supposedly received explanations. Aruni says, “This was no translation; it was the kidnapping of voices.” A fourth box

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Chapter 178 — The Upper Room

contains a “Special Protected Records” register, with names erased into codes. Ramballabh finds the key: K for Kamla, U for Ujjwala, Vi for the widows' group, Ch for Chamru's line. Outside Dhruvesh's men make a disturbance, but three elderly women—Shanti, Subhadra and Ragini—sit on the stairs and block their path. Satyavrat Mehta declares that nothing will be taken out until the owners, witnesses and a public inventory are established. At midday another box yields three stamps: one from Seva Niketan, a counterfeit tehsil seal and a blank rubber piece on which names could be changed. A blurred page marked “Batuk Babu's Instructions” contains phrases such as “public honour,” “paper security,” “withhold copies” and “Chandra... will

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Chapter 178 — The Upper Room

see.” Meera handles it carefully with gloves. By dusk every item has been placed in one of three categories. Ananya declares, “In the upper room we have found voices lost from house after house.” Shanti says, “My thumbprint is no longer alone.” Satyavrat concludes, “The upper room is open, but now we must open the paths above it: the tehsil, bank, registers and city offices.” Ananya makes the next heading: “The Route of the Seals.”

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Chapter 179 — Footprints of the Seal

The children transfer three kinds of seal impressions onto paper and sort them: Seva Niketan's blue circular stamp, the counterfeit tehsil crescent and a blank rubber stamp. Before visiting the tehsil, Meera reads the rules: proceed peacefully, ask questions and put the answers in writing. In the land-transfer register at the tehsil they find “voluntary renunciation of rights” beside Kamla Devi's name, although the ceremony photograph shows her accepting “assistance.” Shanti is stunned: her field was taken on the very day she was given a cloth covering. A clerk admits, “The Seva Niketan people brought the pages ready-made. The official merely stamped them. They were selling trust.” Ujjwala's land record bears “special

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Chapter 179 — Footprints of the Seal

verification,” but the signature is blank. Four names from Chamru's community have been compressed into the code “Ch-group.” Satyavrat Mehta observes that shortening names may amount not only to administrative convenience but also to social erasure. At the city's registration office Kamla Devi's account is marked “transfer complete,” with two witnesses who had acted as masters of ceremonies for Seva Niketan. In the photograph a hand presses down on Kamla's shoulder. Meera says, “The body's language here speaks not of consent but of pressure.” Shanti's deed is dated on a day when she was hospitalized: how could one body be present in two places on the same day? At the bank an examination of the money reveals immediate transfers to

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Chapter 179 — Footprints of the Seal

three accounts: Seva Niketan, a building-materials supplier and Harihar Welfare Trust. Batuknath's name does not appear directly, but the shadow thickens. Outside, Dhruvesh's men try to photograph the group. Devika says, “Photograph my face if you like, but do not steal the face of the papers.” That evening the path is drawn upon a stone: service ceremony → tehsil → registration → bank → trust. Shanti says, “They did not merely steal my field. They stole my trust.” Satyavrat cautions, “Do not rush to accuse; study the structure.” At the end the crocodile rests its snout motionless on the riverbank as if listening, and a strand of red thread slips from a bird's beak. The upper room's seal is no longer simply a footprint; it has

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Chapter 179 — Footprints of the Seal

become a road.

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Chapter 180 — The City's Accounts

Ananya says, “We have yet to see the body of the crime. Yesterday we saw only its feet.” Satyavrat Mehta explains, “Reading accounts is not simply counting money. It is discovering whose trust was turned into whose purse.” Carrying the old ceremonial covering, Shanti goes to an accounting office in the city called “Siddhi Advisory Services.” The accountant, Govardhan Sahay, initially defends himself: “I only put papers in order.” In the file of Harihar Welfare Trust, beneath its worthy stated purposes, donations are shown arriving on dates following the transfer of land from affected families. Shanti matches an entry against the date her field was lost. A page headed “Special Administrative Support” contains the code “Ra.Cha.La.”

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Chapter 180 — The City's Accounts

Aruni begins to speculate, but Meera stops him: “Conjecture belongs on a separate sheet, not in the register.” Govardhan admits that Dhruvesh's men delivered the trust's accounts. A hidden instruction envelope in the drawer reads: “Merge amounts from Kamla, Ujjwala and Ch-group accounts under service donations. Do not list them separately.” As they leave the office a threatening message arrives on Ananya's phone. Devika wraps the phone in cloth: “This is not fear; it is evidence.” The cybercrime officer is at first indifferent, but Meera's explanation gains his attention: “Digital crocodiles leave footprints too.” On their return journey the team's bus meets two of Dhruvesh's men at the old bridge turning; they begin filming.

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Chapter 180 — The City's Accounts

Meera stays calm: “Do not lay hands on anyone. Record what happens.” Devika loudly announces the time, location and description, and the men flee. Back in the village the evidence is distributed among three copies. Shanti says, “Once my thumbprint was alone on a page; now these pages guard one another.” At the night assembly the telephone is placed among the exhibits. Satyavrat extends the diagram: “Justice will have to learn to read the glass of the phone as well.” Ananya opens a page titled “The Teeth of the Digital Crocodile.” Shanti spreads the ceremony cloth as a table for the evidence: “This cloth once covered my shame. Today let it support the proof.” The crocodile rises to the surface, opens its eyes and sinks again.

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Chapter 180 — The City's Accounts

Meera warns that teeth may bite again even after withdrawing.

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Chapter 181 — The Shadow of the SIM Card

Satyavrat Mehta aligns the times of the messages. Over three months, the SIM number changed seven times, but each new number first connected to a tower covering the market near the village bus stand. Ananya circles the bus stand on her map. At a shop called “Madhav Communication Services,” Satyavrat asks to see the SIM register. The shopkeeper Madhav nervously admits that three months earlier papers were brought under the pretext of a “trust service camp.” Thumbprints and photographs were taken, but the phones never reached the customers. In his ledger there are red pencil dots beside names including Ramratiya Devi and Kamlu Paswan. Madhav says he marked the documents that came from outside—from Harihar Service Centre and

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Chapter 181 — The Shadow of the SIM Card

Dhruvesh's people. His nephew mentions a “red box.” Inside are empty SIM envelopes, paper scraps and two photographs, one of Ramratiya Devi, who died two years ago, and the other of Harihar Service Centre's flag. Ananya writes, “A SIM active in a dead woman's name: living threats sent through a dead name.” Madhav weeps: “I did not know these SIMs would be used to threaten people.” Meera replies, “Ignorance does not wash wrongdoing clean, but telling the truth differs from concealing it.” Bishambhar, Dhruvesh's servant, then arrives with three young men on motorcycles and starts filming. Devika immediately reads aloud the time, location and their details, stopping them. The ledger has a mark resembling Bishambhar's signature. He

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Chapter 181 — The Shadow of the SIM Card

denies it, and Aruni says, “The signature can be examined later; his presence has been recorded now.” A crowd gathers to tell its experiences of fraud, turning the bus stand into an invisible court. Meera forms two orderly lines. Bishambhar attempts to leave; Satyavrat says, “You may go, but your arrival, its time and your denial have been written down.” By midday eight names have been recorded: three dead persons, two people who were ill, one migrant and two elderly women unable to read. “This is not merely deception by telephone,” Satyavrat says. “It is theft of existence.” At Channa Grove the evidence is secured. Ramratiya Devi's grandson says, “If fear was sent after Grandmother's death in her name, this insults not her dead

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Chapter 181 — The Shadow of the SIM Card

body but murders her surviving name.” At night they make their next plan. Drumming sounds from Dhruvesh's mansion: “When criminals become afraid, their first act is to make the noise of celebration louder.” Ananya writes, “The SIM's shadow has been caught, but the body casting it is not yet before us.” Aruni adds, “Once the shadow is caught, the body cannot be far away.”

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Chapter 182 — The Door of Harihar Service Centre

Meera recites the rules: “We will examine papers, not seize them. We will not let a crowd become the judge.” At Harihar Service Centre the team meets the elderly watchman Narhari Kaka, who at first tries to dismiss them with “orders from above.” Satyavrat asks, “Where is this 'above'—on the roof, in an office, or in fear?” Narhari opens the latch. The first room holds bundles labelled “Elderly Assistance,” “Housing Benefits” and “SIM Assistance.” Three different mobile numbers appear under Ramratiya Devi's name, with dates matching Madhav's ledger. Narhari admits that Bishambhar, Dhruvesh's assistant and a bespectacled man from the city removed files at night. They open the “upper cupboard,” finding two registers: “Beneficiary

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Chapter 182 — The Door of Harihar Service Centre

Attendance” and “Digital Assistance.” Entries include “phone returned.” Meera says, “A phone registered in someone's name but taken back from that person's hands—this means the theft of a voice.” A crowd gathers, and the women's collective forms a line. Shanti says, “Yesterday we protected the dignity of my papers; today we will protect the dignity of others.” Ananya makes categories: “Name Verified,” “Benefit Refused,” “Thumbprint Without Reading” and “Phone Returned.” Bishambhar arrives, pleading that it is a private institution. Satyavrat replies, “When a private service takes thumbprints in the name of public benefits, its papers cannot escape public questions.” Devika says, “Fire has been under these ashes for a long time;

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Chapter 182 — The Door of Harihar Service Centre

we are only recording the smoke.” For the first time Narhari stands before Bishambhar and refuses to surrender the key. “For years I guarded keys and lost names. What is the point of saving my job now?” A second room contains a computer, printer, scanner and a locked box of “phone distribution” receipts, bearing different thumbprints but identical handwriting. On the cybercrime officer's advice, a pen drive labelled “Camp Photographs” is sealed. By evening the line of witnesses grows, repeating the same story: personal identities appropriated in the name of benefits. At night Ramratiya Devi's grandson says, “If a phone worked in Grandmother's name, it was not her spirit but her name that was enslaved.” Satyavrat draws the

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Chapter 182 — The Door of Harihar Service Centre

provisional chain: service centre → SIM register → phone returned → trust account → threatening messages → Dhruvesh's assistant. Meera says, “Confirmation remains to be done, but the road is clear.” Ananya opens the next page, “The Face Inside the Phone,” and Aruni says, “When the instrument answers, the shadow will speak.”

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Chapter 183 — The Face Inside the Phone

The seal on the pen drive is kept secure overnight. Cybercrime officer Vineet Jha makes a copy while preserving the original, and Aruni writes, “The method of opening truth is itself part of truth.” The seal is opened on a table beneath Channa Grove. The screen shows folders named “Camp Photos,” “Documents,” “Beneficiaries List,” “Returned Phones” and “Special.” At the edge of a photograph in the first folder, Bishambhar is visible. Another shows a young man bending beside Ramratiya Devi, a Harihar Service Centre lanyard around his neck. The date of the photograph matches the SIM activation date in Madhav's register. The “Returned Phones” folder contains a video of phones being handed to elderly people and then taken back. Meera

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Chapter 183 — The Face Inside the Phone

stops the playback: “We are watching for evidence, not for humiliation.” The documents folder contains falsified forms bearing the same handwriting and check marks. The hardest folder to open is “Special.” Its first audio message contains a threat in the police's name, with the scraping sound of a service-centre fan in the background. Narhari Kaka recognizes it: “That's exactly how our fan speaks.” A second message holds the frightened voice of Somri Kaki, a woman from the village believed to be ill. Meera sends two women to her house, without a crowd. Another video blurs the face but clearly shows a long fingernail and a hand with a wound and black thread tied around it. Satyavrat compares it with an old assembly photograph; the

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Chapter 183 — The Face Inside the Phone

hand resembles that of Dhruvesh's assistant. Ananya writes, “Sometimes a face lies while a hand leaves the truth behind.” Somri's statement arrives that evening: “When the police spoke on the phone, someone behind the voice was laughing.” Vineet isolates the laughter in the audio, and Narhari identifies it: “That is not Dhruvesh's assistant; that is the city gentleman.” At night Ramratiya's grandson Deepak places his grandmother's photograph before a lamp: “Today we did not see Grandmother's face; we saw the theft of her name.” Meera says, “We have found the theft. Now we will find the thief's road.” The old ghost says, “Names used to be erased. Now voices are made from names. Find the breath of whoever makes the voice.” Ananya

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Chapter 183 — The Face Inside the Phone

opens the next page, “The Mask of the Voice.”

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Chapter 184 — The Mask of the Voice

Vineet Jha cautions, “A voice comparison is not final proof in court, but it can be a lamp showing the way. Read the voice together with time, place, phone, picture and testimony, never by itself.” A faint laugh sounds behind the threatening message sent to Somri Kaki. Narhari Kaka recognizes it as laughter from the nights when the men removed files and went upstairs. Narhari says the city gentleman spoke little, but often said “Do it quickly” and laughed that “village people will forget.” Devika compares a distinctive pronunciation of the word “first” in an old service-ceremony video with the threatening message. Aruni writes, “The form of a word changes; a habit does not.” A file titled “Re-check” in the Special folder contains

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Chapter 184 — The Mask of the Voice

threatening sentences rehearsed in different voices. Somri Kaki admits that at the camp she was made to repeat “I have received my benefit” three times; she assumed it was for a photograph. Several elderly women, farmers and widows describe similar experiences. The children open a page headed “Voice Testimony.” Bishambhar slips silently into the crowd and is recognized by the injured hand bearing black thread. Meera announces, “Being present where testimony is given does not lessen guilt, but speaking truth can still save one's name.” When Bishambhar's phone rings, he lets slip the word “Sir”; the time is recorded. Narhari reveals that the city gentleman would not allow the fan to be turned off. Three months earlier the old fan

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Chapter 184 — The Mask of the Voice

was taken into the city on the pretext of repairs. Vineet separates the fan's characteristic creaking from the threatening audio on the pen drive. Satyavrat connects the map: service-camp voice samples → phones taken back → fan transported to the city → threatening-call room → trust account. At night Bishambhar finally admits that Dhruvesh called the city gentleman “Madhavesh Babu,” and that this man trained others in imitating voices. Explaining the wound on his black-threaded hand, he says, “I was cut that night when an old person grabbed at the phone box.” When Deepak asks, “Grandmother?”, silence serves as the reply. The crowd surges, but Meera stops it: “A crowd will not catch the criminal; testimony will.” Ananya opens a

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Chapter 184 — The Mask of the Voice

page headed “The Master's Room.” Aruni says, “Where the voice was manufactured, a face must have remained.”

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Chapter 185 — The Master's Room

Vineet Jha plays the fan's creaking sound again. Narhari Kaka recognizes it: “The old fan at Harihar Service Centre used to catch like that. Bishambhar took it down in the name of repairs.” Satyavrat Mehta observes, “Criminals do not take useless things; what they take has a use.” Bishambhar gives the address of the room: above a photocopy shop behind the railway station. Meera forms a small team and keeps Bishambhar back so that he cannot contaminate the evidence. The shop's sign has changed to “Master Media Services.” The rental register gives the tenant's name as “Madhavesh Mishra,” spelled with one vowel sign fewer than the form previously heard, and a mobile number matching the trust instructions. They enter the upstairs

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Chapter 185 — The Master's Room

room with witnesses and an inventory procedure. A fan marked “Hari-2” is on the ceiling; Narhari recognizes it. The room contains mobile-phone stands, a ring light and a false backdrop resembling a police station. On the table are ready-made prompt sheets marked “grandmother voice,” “farmer voice,” “police voice” and “bank voice.” Meera says, “These people were reading the map of relationships, not merely human language.” A box contains name strips. One reads “Ramratiya—grandmother—Deepak—city,” and Deepak's breath catches. Meera comforts him: “You may cry, but do not touch the papers.” A list of audio files includes “Master Police Practice.” A pencil diagram on the wall traces Harihar Service Centre → photocopy room → city

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Chapter 185 — The Master's Room

accounts → trust → “D” → “M.” Satyavrat cautions, “Record the letters, not their meaning.” They also find SIM casings, forged identification cards, a fan-repair receipt and a receipt for renting the desk. Railway tracks are visible from the window. When a train passes, the room trembles and the motionless fan makes a clicking sound. Vineet matches the background rumble on the threatening calls to trains passing at times consistent with the timetable. In a desk drawer lies red thread like the strands carried by birds at Channa Grove. Satyavrat says, “We have found an object; its significance comes later.” Outside, the shopkeeper's son says a man wearing a false beard fled at 11:30 at night with two bags. Meera does not photograph

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Chapter 185 — The Master's Room

the minor. On the bus home Deepak says, “They kept using Grandmother's voice even after she died.” Meera replies, “The voice of the dead is also part of a family's memory, not merchandise for a market.” The evidence is laid out at Channa Grove. The old ghost says, “Once thieves entered people's houses. Now they make a house for stolen voices. We have found the house, but its owner is still on the road.” The master himself remains uncaught. Ananya opens a new page, “Madhavesh's Real Name.”

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Chapter 186 — Madhavesh's Real Name

Ananya opens a page titled “Madhavesh's Real Name.” Meera warns, “No crowd will rise against anyone merely because of a name. People commit crimes; they put on the shell of a name to protect themselves.” Satyavrat Mehta orders the variations of the name found in different papers. Vineet Jha reads the landlord's account from the city rental papers: three different names were used. The shopkeeper's son's testimony leads to the railway station, where a passenger removing a false beard at half past eleven was called “Madhukar.” Narhari Kaka remembers a boy at Harihar Service Centre who could imitate voices: “We laughingly called him Madhukar.” Three names converge—Madhavesh, Maadhavesh and Madhukar. At the old secondary school the

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Chapter 186 — Madhavesh's Real Name

admission register gives “Madhukar Madhav Mishra; father: Maheshwar Mishra; village: Bariyarpur hamlet; temporary address: Harihar Service Centre compound.” The headmaster explains that his father arranged to change the boy's name, saying Madhukar sounded too provincial. Bishambhar identifies Maheshwar Mishra as a relative on Dhruvesh's maternal-uncle's side. A photograph from the school's drama day identifies the child as “Madhukar—voice mimicry.” The scholarship form links Madhukar's account to the service-centre account. Satyavrat cautions, “Even after a person becomes a criminal, his childhood privacy must not be entirely put up for sale.” In Bariyarpur an elderly woman called Kataki recalls, “Madhukar? His voice was like a

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Chapter 186 — Madhavesh's Real Name

bee.” At the threshold of the house they find half a sentence written in charcoal by his deceased mother: “Do not sell voices.” Bishambhar says the master disliked his old name: “Madhukar reminds people of the village, poverty and his mother. Madhavesh makes them think of papers, the city and trust.” Ananya writes, “He ran away from his mother's voice and sold the voices of other people's mothers.” Vineet draws the line Harihar Service Centre → voice imitation → Dhruvesh's service network → station room → SIM cards and trust → arrest, leaving an unconfirmed gap. Meera says, “The gap is written down, so the line is honest.” Satyavrat writes a final observation; Meera insists on securing the legal copy before publicly disclosing

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Chapter 186 — Madhavesh's Real Name

the name. Ananya opens the next page, “The Queen Inside the Hive.” Aruni asks, “We have found the bee; in whose house has the honey been gathered?”

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Chapter 187 — The Queen Inside the Hive

Part 2 · The Main Story

Ananya opens a page headed “The Queen Inside the Hive.” Meera warns, “Do not accuse a woman because you hear the word queen. If criminals use women's names as shields, removing the shield is our first task.” In the equipment from the master's room, Vineet finds a table with three sections: “Flower,” “Honey” and “Queen.” A cybercrime officer traces small payments slowly accumulating into larger sums in the section called Queen. The first Queen account belongs to Rani Devi of Haripur Katan. Meera reminds everyone: “A name has been read, not a crime established.” The team visits Rani Devi, who says her thumbprint was taken on the promise of an old-age pension. Payments arrived for two months and then stopped. Her partially damaged

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Chapter 187 — The Queen Inside the Hive

thumb does not match the round, clear thumbprint in the account. Vineet says, “The name is genuine; the thumbprint is false.” Meera adds, “Then the woman is not the criminal. The crime has been committed against her.” Her grandson says the service centre repeatedly made his grandmother press her thumb against a glass plate, claiming the machine was defective. The second Rani is Rani Kumari, who married and left the area five years earlier. The third, “Rani Women's Assistance Committee,” exists only on paper. Meera says, “Those whom society calls weak become strong safes for criminals' use.” Bishambhar reveals that the master did not name these accounts Queen. Maheshwar Babu, above Dhruvesh in the hierarchy, instructed them to

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Chapter 187 — The Queen Inside the Hive

open accounts in women's names because objections would not arise quickly. Maheshwar's name is spoken clearly for the first time. A committee register bears the seal “Maheshwarnath Sevak, Coordinator.” Aruni says, “He may not be the queen of this hive, but its keeper.” Meera insists on retaining the words “may be”; there is no verdict yet. The old ghost comments that once sins were hidden by writing women's names on plates of offerings; now they are hidden under women's names in digital accounts. The plate and account have changed, not the trick. Rani Devi's grandson asks them to clear his grandmother's name, and Meera opens a “Name Correction List.” Deepak says, “Let justice begin in the names used to perpetrate the crimes.”

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Chapter 187 — The Queen Inside the Hive

Satyavrat concludes that the Queen section appears to be a multilayered cover, not the actual controller, and that Maheshwar seems to have built the paper hive, subject to confirmation. Ananya opens “Maheshwar's Seal.” Aruni says, “Find the hand. Catch it through evidence, not through a mob.”

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Chapter 188 — Maheshwar's Seal

Satyavrat Mehta finds the same circular seal, “Maheshwarnath Sevak, Coordinator,” on three documents. The letter corresponding to “v” in “Sevak” is compressed. Aruni remarks, “Do not trust a seal in which the word service itself has been crushed.” Meera says, “A seal is not a criminal, but its use may open a path to crime.” Vineet Jha points out minute differences in images of the three impressions. Narhari Kaka recalls that in childhood Maheshwar rang temple bells and was called “Mahesar”; the name became “Maheshwar,” and later “Sevak” was added. “The cloth of humility can be tied across crime's face.” Bajrang, a maker of rubber stamps in the village, recognizes the mechanical defect that compressed the letter. He says a similar

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Chapter 188 — Maheshwar's Seal

machine operated in the lane behind the station, linking the seals to the master's room. Bajrang remembers an apprentice delivering an order for three stamps, saying only “It is Sevakji's order,” and refusing to sign. Deepak, Ramratiya Devi's grandson, says, “They stole Grandmother's voice; now I see they stamped that voice too.” Meera explains that together the two methods created the digital crocodile. The dates on bank papers show the seal applied five days before the authorization letter. Vineet says, “When the future is decided in advance, the papers are filled out afterward.” Three women testify that they have never seen Maheshwarnath; Satyavrat notes that a person whose seal circulates is often absent in person. Vineet

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Chapter 188 — Maheshwar's Seal

Part 2 · The Main Story

3 / 4

retrieves an old bill from the stamp shop behind the station. Ananya draws a map whose outline resembles a crocodile's open jaws. In an old donation booklet from Harihar Service Centre, Maheshwarnath's position is listed as “Keeper of Keys.” Narhari discloses a practice dating back to Batuknath Hariharan: people were induced to sign blank letterheads, with names filled in later. The story returns to its roots. Bajrang says blue ink was specially requested because it would show clearly in photographs. Somri Kaki says she was threatened over the phone with a document displaying a round blue impression. At dusk an old watchman named Gadadhar reveals the existence of an iron chest and produces a rusted key he had been told “never to

Chapter 188 — Maheshwar's Seal

use.” The old ghost says, “A key that never opens a locked chest imprisons a soul.” Meera decides on a formal opening at dawn. Satyavrat records, “Conclusion deferred, but the chain is clear.” Ananya opens the page “The Iron Box.”

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Chapter 189 — The Iron Box

At dawn Meera repeats the rule: the storehouse will be opened before the panchayat, police, bank, women's committee and children. “Opening the box is testimony, not curiosity.” Behind sacks of cement in the storehouse they find a black iron box. Gadadhar opens the lock with trembling hands. The first layer contains dried coconut leaves. Meera says, “A crime can begin under leaves associated with good fortune. The leaves are not guilty; examine the use to which they were put.” The second layer holds a stack of blank letterheads. Ananya says, “Where the name is to be filled in later, the person has already been made to disappear.” Blue-and-black carbon sheets are also found. The third layer contains bags sorted by colour: red for

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Chapter 189 — The Iron Box

women's committees; blue for banks; black for telephone lists, with notes against names such as “old,” “illiterate” and “call at night,” including the name of Deepak's grandmother; and yellow for labourers' claims. The yellow bag contains an incomplete page about Bisesar Paswan marked “absence” rather than “death,” bearing Batuknath Hariharan's old seal. Gadadhar admits, “I did not know all this was here.” Meera replies, “We will record that you did not know; we will also record that although you had the key, you did not open it.” The fourth layer holds three seals, identified by Bajrang. A cloth bag contains five pieces of rubber for copying thumbprint impressions. Somri Kaki cries out, “Did they manufacture my thumbprint too?”

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Chapter 189 — The Iron Box

The fifth layer contains a blue notebook. Satyavrat reads an entry: “Ramratiya—son away—night—arrest letter…” It reveals Madhukar's voice-fraud network as an organized course of instruction. A folded page reads “Batuknath Hariharan Memorial Fund,” with Maheshwar, Dhruvesh and Madhukar named on separate lines. Meera insists that families must be consulted before victims' names are made public. Ananya says, “A victim's name is not a spectacle.” Deepak asks, “Can loneliness also be stolen?” Satyavrat answers, “Yes, when it is turned into a cue for producing fear.” The old ghost says, “The iron box holds fewer iron objects than holes torn in people's lives.” At dusk the box is resealed under police supervision. Satyavrat records

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Chapter 189 — The Iron Box

that the older institutional framework of the crime and its newer digital methods appear connected in one collection. Meera adds, “The box has been opened, but the people remain shut in.” Ananya opens the page, “The Blue Register.”

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Chapter 190 — The Blue Register

Meera cautions, “Not every name in this register is something to be made public.” Vineet Jha adds the procedures required by law. When the register opens, its first page is headed “Service List: Special Protection.” The columns are name, relationship, fear, voice, account, share and status. Meera says, “This register contains not names but methods for breaking people.” Under “Fear” are notes such as “son abroad,” “widow” and “mother alone.” The second page contains women's names; Meera stresses that the women are victims, not suspects. The third page lists workers, including “Bi.Pa.” for Bisesar Paswan. Satyavrat says, “If an old matter still breathes inside the accounts, it is not old.” A folded middle page contains a map in

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Chapter 190 — The Blue Register

blue ink connecting Harihar Service Centre, Maheshwarnath Trust, the Queen accounts, SIMs, the bank and the practice room, with a question mark beside Batuknath Memorial Fund. Gadadhar explains that Sevakji considered blue ink reassuring. The fourth page is devoted to “Practice”: voice samples and threatening scripts. Ananya says, “This is not language; it is a noose.” Another entry reads “Time of Silence”; Aruni writes that silence itself needs investigation. The “Share” column lists percentages and Dhruvesh's initials. Gadadhar admits that the register began as a “Beneficiaries' Register” and became a “Register of Fear” after Dhruvesh arrived. “Do not erase names; put reasons behind the names.” One page includes the name of

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Chapter 190 — The Blue Register

Aruni's father, “Nand Aruni,” with notes: “former engineer—report—workers' list—family connection—caution.” Stunned, Aruni asks why his father's report disappeared. Cues reading “diary,” “cloth,” and “Ba” connect Channa Grove, the cloth, Ba and the water burial on the same page. Hulasi appears insultingly as “Well-Woman.” Meera says, “That is not a name but an insult. Restore her real name.” Copies are prepared until afternoon. Meera insists, “Old criminals coloured the register to suit themselves; we will not even add our anger to the original page.” A yellow slip falls from the back cover: “Keep the register safe; instructions oral; do not open a page without asking the chair.” Between two circles is a diagonal line, identified

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Chapter 190 — The Blue Register

by Gadadhar as Dhruvesh's mark. The final page reads, “No new names on the completed page; new names go in a separate register.” The network remains active; only its register has changed. Satyavrat concludes that what began as a register of beneficiaries appears over time to have been transformed into a list of targets based on fear. At dusk only its empty blue cover is set beside the grove. Hulasi says, “Names will survive when the water refuses to take on colour.” Ananya writes, “Dhruvesh's Chair: Even the person who has not sat upon it must be made to rise.”

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Chapter 191 — Dhruvesh's Chair

Ananya opens a new page, “Dhruvesh’s Chair.” Meera repeats the rule: “The room will be opened, but no crowd will go upstairs; the chair will not be moved.” Gadadhar unlocks the upper room and admits that at night he heard a phone ring, a man speaking softly and the scrape of a chair being dragged. Every stair bears a different deposit of dust or a distinct mark. “The staircase, too, is testimony.” On the wall calendar someone has written “17” with a new pen. A blue thread caught in one wheel of the chair matches the blue of the register’s cover. Drag marks on the floor form a circle: “Impatient waiting.” On the desk lie a bell, a broken charger and a box of rubber stamps. Gadadhar says that Madhukar generally came when the bell

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Chapter 191 — Dhruvesh's Chair

rang, while the door was opened in Dhruvesh’s name. Vineet Jha remarks, “The one who sits reads the orders; the one who writes the orders remains absent.” In the first drawer is a slip marked “Mother alone—soften voice.” Satyavrat Mehta writes, “Crime is not information alone; it is performance as well.” A sealed audio recorder lies in the second drawer; Vineet sets it aside for technical examination. Meera insists, “The victim’s voice will not be played to a fairground of ears.” A third, jammed drawer holds a stack of blank statements, bearing the pencilled instruction “If they object, make it a confession.” Aruni says, “The criminal first scripts fear and then makes the victim speak the confession.” A “victim map” hangs on the

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Chapter 191 — Dhruvesh's Chair

wall. Behind the chair are traces of worship. Meera says that where the smell of incense conceals fear, the worship has become a screen. Beneath the cushion they find an envelope marked “Dhru.” It contains a letter from Maheshwarnath, Madhukar’s appointment note, Dhruvesh’s specimen signature, a copy of the register and a torn portion of Nand Aruni’s old report. Aruni trembles. Meera says that the chain from the Ganga water burial to digital detention is becoming clear. The blue thread in the wheel carries soil from Channa Grove; its upper leaves are visible through the window. They do not remove the chair at dusk: they draw a yellow boundary around it and seal the room. Satyavrat notes, “The centre of the crime will now move

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Chapter 191 — Dhruvesh's Chair

beyond the chair toward the source of the orders.” At Channa Grove, the circular mark made by the chair’s dust is traced onto a stone. Hulasi says, “Whether Dhruvesh sat here or not, the chair is calling his name.” Ananya opens the next page, “The Voice of the Sealed Recorder.”

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Chapter 192 — The Voice of the Sealed Recorder

Meera lays down the rule: “The recorder is not a toy. It will not be played for everyone to hear.” Vineet Jha explains the procedure. Abhay, a forensic examiner of sound recordings, comes from the city and removes his shoes as a gesture of respect. The recorder’s memory card bears the mark “Dhru,” like the envelope from the chair; Vineet cautions that matching marks are not conclusive proof. The files are labelled “Soft_Mother,” “Law_Fear,” “Son_Abroad,” “Confession,” “Chair_Night,” “Nand_List” and “New_Register.” “Soft_Mother” is played before a restricted group of witnesses. Hearing a counterfeit, honeyed voice, one woman begins to cry, and Meera stops the playback at once. When a shorter extract is played, a second male voice

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Chapter 192 — The Voice of the Sealed Recorder

can be heard whispering from behind, “Not a threat—motherly affection,” suggesting two sources. “Law_Fear” contains a severe official-sounding voice. Satyavrat writes, “The language of the state has been stolen.” It also contains the instruction “Bisesar’s case is old; do not open it now,” connecting the recording with Nand Aruni’s list of deaths. In “Nand_List” someone reads a fragment of Nand’s torn report while another says from the background, “Cut this part; we only want the names.” Aruni grows angry. After a break, “Confession” yields Madhukar’s coercive voice, which Gadadhar recognizes; Gadadhar agrees to put the full identification in writing. “Chair_Night” consists largely of sounds from the room, ending with a whisper:

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Chapter 192 — The Voice of the Sealed Recorder

“Put the new names in a separate register.” This matches the last page of the blue register. In “New_Register,” a voice says, “Remove the old names; count those who have risen as dead.” Then someone asks, “Aruni?” and another answers, “Do not spare the children; they are becoming guardians of the names.” Genuine fear fills the room. Meera immediately makes the children’s safety a priority. When Ananya wants to object, Meera explains that not being afraid and being careless are two different things. Abhay says that voice identification requires comparison samples; names cannot be assigned by guesswork alone. At the end of the day the recorder is switched off, but the transcript and inventory are prepared. “We have heard the

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Chapter 192 — The Voice of the Sealed Recorder

voices,” Meera says, “but we shall not put suffering on display.” At dusk an empty earthen bowl is placed at Channa Grove in place of the recorder. Hulasi says that a voice which steals another person’s throat must be restrained. Meera writes, “The voice has been found, but its face remains to be found.” Ananya opens “The Face of the Voice.”

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Chapter 193 — The Face of the Voice

Part 2 · The Main Story

Meera says, “No one shall be declared guilty merely because of what our ears tell us. Put the time, place, equipment, witnesses and samples beside the voice.” Abhay explains the technique of examining a voice’s patterns—its geography of sound. Madhukar supplies a voice sample but stumbles over the fifth of five sentences. In search of Dhruvesh’s sample, Gadadhar brings old CDs and discs. The third disc shows the inauguration of Harihar Service Centre, where Dhruvesh declares, “The village’s suffering is my suffering.” Abhay identifies recurring features: a throat-clearing before the sound “r,” a whistle after “s,” and an exhalation at the end of a sentence. Meera warns, “Write that they correspond; do not announce a verdict.”

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Chapter 193 — The Face of the Voice

Satyavrat observes that a voice can change with practice, but the breath of fear is harder to alter. In old bank meeting records and a video, Dhruvesh can be heard saying, “Trust first, then fear,” the same words Madhukar repeated in the sealed recording. Meera arranges three copies. An impatient crowd demands that the name be announced; she holds them back: if evidence is damaged in haste, the criminals will use that haste as a shield. Madhukar hears only the phrase “Trust first, then fear.” Shaking, he says the voice was “like Dhruvesh Babu’s.” Meera corrects him: “Not ‘like.’ Say you are certain only if you are certain.” Madhukar reveals the grounds for his fear: threats to his mother’s medicine, his son’s employment and the

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Chapter 193 — The Face of the Voice

papers for his house. In a written statement he says his instructions came from Dhruvesh: “Take the victim first toward service, then papers, then fear, then the account.” Ananya writes, “One face, many teeth.” Abhay prepares a technical report. An elderly woman comes in secret to say, “It is the same person who used to speak from the service-centre stage.” Where a name must remain concealed, Ananya draws a lamp instead: “When it is necessary to hide a name, write down its light.” The question of serving a summons at Dhruvesh’s house arises. In an old photograph of the service centre, Ananya notices a dark mark behind his shoulder. At dusk, water mixed with incense ash in the bowl reveals a blurred face, the back of a chair and

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Chapter 193 — The Face of the Voice

an uplifted thumb. Panidubbi says, “The face will endure in people’s statements, not in the water.” Budhba’s ghost says, “Find the rightful owner of the voice that was forced into another mouth.” That night all the day’s evidence is put into envelopes. Satyavrat’s closing note reads: “The face of the voice is partly disclosed. A criminal covering his face can no longer hide his breath.” Ananya opens “The Summons to Breathe.”

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Chapter 194 — The Summons to Breathe

Ananya opens “The Summons to Breathe.” Meera clarifies, “A summons is not a punishment but a call to appear. Now explain the relationship among your breath, your voice, your signature, your chair and your register.” Vineet Jha prepares the legal summons. Abhay summarizes the acoustic comparison: there is sufficient similarity to warrant inquiry, but a legally obtained voice sample is needed for a definitive conclusion. Gadadhar, a constable and Aruni go to serve the summons at Dhruvesh’s new permanent house. His manager Sheetanshu says, “Babu has gone to the city for treatment; he left last night.” Aruni notices tyre marks and is suspicious. The summons is affixed beneath the notice board. As soon as it is posted, a telephone

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Chapter 194 — The Summons to Breathe

rings inside the house. Gadadhar recognizes the bell: “That is the very ring.” Aruni writes, “The summons was not handed over; it was displayed. Record the difference.” By midday rumours spread that Dhruvesh has fled, but Meera restrains the crowd’s speculation. His lawyer sends a letter that evening; Meera replies that the collection of a voice sample is not postponed. Abhay prepares five controlled test sentences. The last—“A crocodile’s teeth may seize the body, but not the name”—silences everyone. Budhba’s ghost says that courts of the living are not the only ones to send summons; the dead also summon people. Hulasi writes names such as Bisesar, Chhotu, Salamat and Nand Aruni in the air. There is movement at Dhruvesh’s house

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Chapter 194 — The Summons to Breathe

at night, with vehicles coming and going, and Meera repeats the discipline of recording evidence. Vineet alerts the bank to monitor the accounts. Satyavrat says, “Looking for the face of a voice, we have reached the pulse of money.” Abhay detects a faint sound resembling a distant temple bell in the recorder, which he compares with the automatic bell in Dhruvesh’s prayer room. At Channa Grove, the dead are named aloud in a nocturnal “reading of summons.” The next morning the lawyer proposes giving the sample at a private hospital; Meera refuses: a lawful sample must be taken at the designated authorized place. Sheetanshu’s former assistant Mohan Paswan secretly appears and admits to delivering two sealed envelopes. He had been

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Chapter 194 — The Summons to Breathe

told, “No receipt, no recollection.” Meera gives him water, a seat and time to speak. Satyavrat quotes Nand Aruni’s diary: “Where there is no receipt, let memory become the receipt.” Ananya writes the next title, “The Frozen Accounts.” Aruni adds, “When the route of money closes, the voice of fear changes.” An unanswered telephone rings three times in the night.

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Chapter 195 — The Frozen Accounts

Before the bank shutters open in the morning, a queue has formed: news of the previous night's order freezing accounts has spread. Ananya writes, "The Frozen Accounts." Meera tells Vineet Jha that no account is to be blocked merely because its holder has a similar name. The first account, "Harihar Service Centre Relief Fund," shows numerous small deposits and heavy withdrawals marked "special service." Gadadhar says that "special service" meant instructions from above. A second account is in the names of Madhukar's family; money from elderly people's accounts was withdrawn and turned into cash at night. Surajmukhi Devi, recorded as "Surja Devi" in the register, comes forward and describes selling her goat to make a donation after

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Chapter 195 — The Frozen Accounts

a telephone threat that her son would be arrested. Meera asks the children to write down her full, correct name. Aruni writes, “Before a person’s name was cut away, their money was cut away.” Five accounts are immediately frozen. On the bank wall someone writes: “Do not stop the victim’s means of living; stop the criminal’s movement.” As news of the orders spreads, threatening calls begin, including one in Madhukar’s trembling voice. Meera does not answer. Bank manager Manoj Mishra admits receiving calls “from above,” described as “Dhruvesh Babu’s instructions.” Satyavrat notes that this still requires corroboration. A bundle of old slips in a rear room includes a payment headed “Assistance for Nand Aruni’s Report,” although the

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Chapter 195 — The Frozen Accounts

money had actually travelled upward. Aruni trembles and Ananya preserves the slip. By midday five accounts are frozen, two are under partial investigation and Dhruvesh's private "Research Trust" remains disputed. Abhay finds that the trust purchased recording equipment and paid bills for a rest house. Vineet remarks, "Independence on paper; dependence in transactions." As a crowd gathers outside, Meera explains: "Frozen money is not justice; it is only a dam across the flow of crime." By evening the accounts have been mapped as a ring. Aruni says, "These are not accounts; this is a cycle of fear." A crowd shouting "Save the service" gathers outside Harihar Service Centre. Meera says that a service which dies when its account is

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Chapter 195 — The Frozen Accounts

frozen was not a service at all, but a business. That night the children keep two separate books: a register of victims’ claims and a register of criminal accounts. Budhba’s ghost says that money’s current has been stopped, but the meaning of *jal samadhi*—water burial—remains unexplained. At midnight investigators find two more accounts belonging to Dhruvesh’s trust, one labelled “Preservation of People’s Memory.” Ananya is furious. An automated call comes in the morning, with breathing audible behind it. Satyavrat’s final note announces the next step: reading the meaning of drowned memory and water burial in both legal and popular terms. Panidubbi places a drop of dew on the ledger; the drop does not sink into the page.

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Chapter 195 — The Frozen Accounts

Budhba’s ghost says, “It is forgetting that drowns a person even where there is no water.” Ananya writes “The Meaning of Water Burial,” and Aruni adds, “The name that drowned in oblivion will rise now.”

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Chapter 196 — The Meaning of Water Burial

Ananya reads the final line written the previous night: “Those who sank in water lost their bodies; those who sank into oblivion lost their names.” Aruni brings three empty vessels to stand for three kinds of water. Meera says, “We are about to fill them not with water but with meaning.” The son of Fakira Sahni, an old boatman, arrives with a bronze bowl and asks, “If a body goes into the water, its name can still cling to the bank. But when a name is struck out on paper, where can that name find a bank?” Meera pours water from the village well for the memory of women who died within their homes. Aruni pours water from the Kamala-Balan for farmers whose field embankments the river swallowed. Devika pours Ganga water for labourers

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Chapter 196 — The Meaning of Water Burial

such as Bisesar, Salamat and Chhotu, whose bodies went among the crocodiles while the report classified them as “absent.” Satyavrat Mehta is overcome when he reads a line from Nand Aruni’s diary: “The crocodile eats the body, not the name.” Meera explains, “Today the meaning of water burial will not be decided by Dhruvesh. Today is a rite for meaning itself. Justice’s first rule is to bring up those who have been submerged.” Ananya opens a page headed “Names Brought to the Surface”: Bisesar Paswan, Salamat Ansari, Gopi Mahto and Rajnu Mandal. For a fifth, “Chhotu,” whose real name is still unknown, an empty space remains. Aruni draws a line from “splash” to “frozen account,” with “name” between them. Meera draws another from

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Chapter 196 — The Meaning of Water Burial

“shame” to “testimony,” with “a woman’s voice” between them: “Water burial did not happen only at the bridge; it happened inside houses too.” Devika draws a third from voice to face, with breath in between. An elderly woman brings the ashes of burned banknotes—the ashes of trust—and says, “My son was safe, but my trust died.” Meera asks her to put the ashes by the register instead of throwing them away. Budhba’s ghost shows glimpses of old scenes in the water; together they form the word “above.” Meera names what must be raised: “Bodies, names, voices, soil, trust, pensions, testimony and a child’s true name—all those that were drowned.” Vineet Jha gives a legal formulation: water burial is not physical death alone, but an

Chapter 196 — The Meaning of Water Burial

organized suppression of memory, identity, records, economic autonomy, social dignity and voice. Satyavrat says the law sometimes walks behind the suffering of ordinary people; today suffering will lead and the law must follow. The children put leaves around the bowl. News comes that an associate of Dhruvesh is leaving the city; Meera says to let the drowned come up first. At dusk the water in the bowl turns strangely white. Budhba's ghost says, "You are performing not a water burial now but an opening of the waters." Satyavrat says they have brought the beginning as far as justice, and Meera weeps openly for the first time. Aruni writes: "Water burial is not merely when water takes a body away; it is when a name is cut out of

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Chapter 196 — The Meaning of Water Burial

people's memory. Today the first name surfaced." The next page opens: "Names Rising to the Surface."

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Chapter 197 — Names Rising to the Surface

At dawn the bowl's water is still. Meera establishes the rule: "Whatever rises today will not be made into a spectacle. We will read a name aloud when the family permits it, and respect the silence of families that choose not to speak." Leaves placed around the bowl show incomplete letters and phrases—"Chho," "tu," "son of a Musahar woman." Satyavrat Mehta finds "Shiv...lal" and the crossed-out name "Chhotu" in Nand Aruni's diary among entries on child workers. Vineet Jha matches the mother's name, "Phoolkali," with the labour register. An elderly woman steps forward: "I am Phoolkali. My son did not run away. Just read that much." Ananya writes: "Shivlal, also known as Chhotu; mother Phoolkali; dead/missing at the bridge

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Chapter 197 — Names Rising to the Surface

worksite; recorded as absent.” She strikes out “absent” and replaces it with “Taken by the water; his name is present.” Phoolkali bows her head: “After so many years your name has come home, son.” Bisesar Paswan’s entry has to be examined again because his father’s name differs. On the testimony of a grandson it is marked “Name established according to maternal memory,” and Vineet creates a new column. Surajmukhi Devi asks for her own name to be corrected. Meera says, “The names of the dead will be raised, and the names of the living will be cleansed along the way. They are not separate tasks.” At midday Dhruvesh’s lawyer complains of “emotional pressure.” Meera replies that restoring suppressed names in public is an act of

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Chapter 197 — Names Rising to the Surface

justice, and that the language of justice should be a lamp, not a fire. On an old assistance-pledge sheet bearing Maheshwarnath's seal, the signature space is empty. Phoolkali says, "My son went into the water and the paper stayed above; now the paper has been brought down." Satyavrat warns that supplying a false, complete name would be a second killing. Ananya replaces "unknown" with "name incomplete; search continuing." Aruni sets out a "basket of waiting," and Devika ties red thread around it. By evening a soaked labour-department register reveals the same clerk's signature against payments to workers after their deaths. Vineet says someone was drawing their wages even after they were dead. Phoolkali brings soil to the bowl:

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Chapter 197 — Names Rising to the Surface

“The name has come up from the water. Now let it stand on earth.” Budhba’s ghost says that lifting up a name does not free the dead; it begins the living people’s work. Unusual movement is seen at the upper window of Dhruvesh’s house that night. Meera orders that only what was witnessed be recorded, not guesses. Abhay agrees to keep watch without pursuing anyone. Satyavrat says that justice which wins by breaking its own procedures plants the seed of further injustice. Ananya writes that the first list of restored names has been made, but Meera cautions that the ending may be moving without being closed. Phoolkali leaves Chhotu’s leaf not at home but on the communal plate, so that everyone will call him by name. At night, the

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Chapter 197 — Names Rising to the Surface

sound of a vehicle comes from the distant city. A young watcher reports that an iron chest was loaded into a car through the rear gate of Dhruvesh’s house, and the car turned toward an unmetalled track. “No more conjecture,” says Meera. “It is time for the sequence of action.” Ananya opens “The Criminal’s Earth.”

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Chapter 198 — The Criminal's Earth

Ananya opens a new page. Meera says, “Tonight our darkness will not become feet for a pursuit; our feet will become witnesses.” Abhay instructs them to collect visual evidence rather than give chase and informs the tehsil’s night team. Dhruvesh’s vehicle sinks into the sand at a dirt-road bend near the Kharihani channel. Meera keeps back the crowd: “Anyone who rushes to pull it free may end up helping to conceal the evidence.” By lamplight Dhruvesh and two assistants can be seen pushing a chest, and Ananya records the time and place. Dhruvesh shudders as he looks toward the shadow of a grove; he hears Budhba’s ghost say, “He who cut names from the soil now finds his feet caught in it.” Dhruvesh shouts, “This is my private

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Chapter 198 — The Criminal's Earth

property.” Meera answers, “Private property does not flee through a back gate at night.” Surajmukhi Devi arrives too: “I do not want the box to escape before my eyes.” Two officers from the police outpost begin preparing an inventory. Dhruvesh’s phone rings repeatedly; Meera asks that it be allowed to ring aloud, but he cuts the calls. The vehicle number, time, chest’s condition and marks in the soil are entered in the record. Dhruvesh demands a search warrant. Vineet Jha explains the procedure for a seizure memorandum, and Meera checks the crowd’s impatience: “Justice must not answer the criminal’s impatience with impatience of its own.” Phoolkali puts a little soil on her forehead: “This earth must know his feet.” As the seal

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Chapter 198 — The Criminal's Earth

is being applied, Dhruvesh steps backward, leaving a shoe stuck in the mud and emerging barefoot. Suppressed laughter rises in the crowd; Meera stops it: “We will not humiliate someone for being barefoot.” Abhay marks out the footprint with pegs. “You have already made me guilty,” Dhruvesh protests. Satyavrat answers, “If you are innocent, the earth may speak for you too. But fleeing feet seldom speak innocence very well.” The chest is sealed officially and taken away in an outpost vehicle. Beneath it remains a deep rectangular impression in the sand. Meera says, “Earth is marked not by colour but by weight.” Budhba’s ghost says that a criminal cannot escape the earth: he needs soil, a home, a room and an account, and one day

Chapter 198 — The Criminal's Earth

that same earth reads his footprints. At dawn Meera asks everyone to return to the grove without slogans; the night in which earth testified should not be smothered with noise. Phoolkali puts a dot of Kharihani soil beside Chhotu’s leaf: “His name came up from water; now I have given it feet.” Satyavrat writes that justice is not only the proving of guilt but also giving the earth a chance to speak. At daybreak Dhruvesh’s shoe still lies trapped in the mud, shining with dew. Sometimes, the chapter concludes, the offender escapes, but his feet are left with the earth; where feet remain, the name is not far behind.

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Chapter 199 — Morning Inside the Chest

In the morning Meera tells everyone, “The chest will be opened, but not as a celebration.” Its seal is cut at the police outpost. A mixed smell escapes: silt from the Ganga, an old courthouse, banknotes and labourers’ sweat. Meera says, “This chest did not hold objects; it held fear of time.” The upper layer contains an old gamchha cloth, a dry coconut leaf and a bundle tied with red thread. Phoolkali trembles at the cloth, but does not touch it before it is recorded. The bundle contains a torn page of a wage register. Satyavrat reads: “Shivnath Sada, age sixteen, mother Phoolkali, day wages entered for three days, payment zero; note: absent.” Phoolkali whispers, “Chhotu.” Ananya writes: “Chhotu’s real name confirmed: Shivnath

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Chapter 199 — Morning Inside the Chest

Sada.” The second layer holds files. “Water Burial—Old” contains a copy of Nand Aruni’s diary, with “The crocodile eats the body, not the name” and an estimated list of three hundred names. Someone has written “exaggeration” in red ink across a blank space. Satyavrat says, his voice breaking, “When the offender cannot cut away the evidence, he calls the suffering exaggerated.” The “Queen Accounts” file contains over twenty women’s names; one of them, Jamuna, says, “I have never been to a bank in my life.” Wax moulds are also found. Ananya writes, “Stealing a thumbprint is more than an insult to the hand: it is a theft of existence.” The “Digital Orders” file contains prepared scripts for issuing threats. Meera says, “This is not

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Chapter 199 — Morning Inside the Chest

simply a crime against money but the abduction of the mind.” In a corner of the chest lie three mobile phones, five SIM cards and a recorder. Madhukar’s voice can be heard on it. Dhruvesh denies responsibility: “That is not my voice.” Satyavrat remains calm. At the bottom lies a bag of blank letterheads, seals and a map with a point marked “Channa.” Devika replies, “For us, this is the grove that listens.” The last page contains a chain of names—Batuknath Hariharan, Maheshwarnath, Madhukar and Dhruvesh—followed by an empty space labelled “future successor.” Meera shudders: “Crime is larger than an individual. If we leave that space empty, the next Dhruvesh will be born.” Satyavrat decides that the blank designation itself should

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Chapter 199 — Morning Inside the Chest

be made public. Everything is inventoried, originals protected and three copies prepared. In the evening the emptied chest is set upside down. Phoolkali comes out: until yesterday she was Chhotu’s mother; now she is Shivnath Sada’s mother. At Channa Grove, pieces of evidence are placed on separate stones. Budhba’s ghost remains above them: “Now let the living do it themselves.” Meera asks the final question: will the grove become a memorial or a guardian? Satyavrat says, “A memorial gives the dead a place. A guardian gives the living a task.” Ananya writes “Guardians of the Names.” Aruni adds, “An ending becomes a beginning when a village surrenders the right to close its eyes.” Just before dawn the oldest leaf of Channa Grove

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Chapter 199 — Morning Inside the Chest

breaks away and falls. Phoolkali places it beside Shivnath’s page and says, “Now we shall keep watch over him.”

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

At dawn Meera reaches the grove first. “The last chapter will be written today,” she says, “but this is not the end. This is the page on which we open our eyes and take responsibility for our names.” Ananya reads the titles of the chapters in sequence. The names of both victims and offenders are spoken, because “without the offender’s name, even the crime remains incomplete.” Phoolkali places a copy of Shivnath’s page beside a leaf: “This is not my son’s death certificate. It is the page of his homecoming.” Satyavrat Mehta says that if the case file reaches the court while the name does not live in the village, the judgment will be only half complete. From this day each half must seek the other. Children make a circle, and one

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

says, “The crocodile eats the body, not the name.” The words become a guiding maxim for the future. In the bowl’s water appears the village’s present face. Meera says, “The watch began over the names of the dead, but it must reach the bodies of the living.” Abhay asks where they shall put the names of the silences within themselves. Satyavrat opens a “Register of Silence”: fear, profit, showmanship, excessive trust in hearing dates, the habit of closing one’s eyes to papers, photography at the expense of poor people’s suffering, and the commerce of pain. At midday the villagers install clay plaques around the grove, one name on each; empty spaces are reserved for incomplete names. Phoolkali places a lamp by them: “Those whose

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

names have not been found must not be given darkness.” An old litigant arrives from the court that evening and says, “For the first time someone on the veranda asked me how many hearing dates had eaten up my life.” At night the chapter titles are read once more. After the last, “Guardians of the Names,” the whole village walks round the grove’s outer ring. Each household brings a stone and a letter; together they spell, “Keep the vigil over names alive.” At last Budhba’s ghost climbs down from a branch and, with his fingernail, writes in an empty place, “The names of those not yet born.” Panidubbi mixes Ganga silt into the bowl. A crocodile appears in the whirlpool, letters caught between its teeth. As the letters float free they

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

form the words “The crocodile eats the body, not the name.” Phoolkali weeps openly for the first time, surrounded by the village women. Satyavrat records his final testimony: “Today Garh Narikel became a guardian of names; no body without a name.” Devika turns the declaration into song. Before sunrise Meera sets the shadow-copy of the empty chest outside the grove: “The chest is not a memorial but a warning.” At sunrise the children play kabaddi and a game of calling names. Whoever forgets a name must return for another turn at learning. The village gradually resumes its daily routine, but a sentence remains written at its thresholds: “No story is complete without a name.” Ba hangs a blank cloth on one of the grove’s lower

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

branches: “Whenever a new injustice first begins to tremble, we shall write its name here.” Finally Meera passes the bowl to Ananya, Ananya to Aruni, and Aruni to a small child. The child puts one drop on the soil, making a fresh circle, and the story begins again. This time the ghosts come to watch, not to play; the living play and the dead stand guard. Budhba’s ghost returns to the branch and for the first time sets the umpire’s staff down on the ground: “Let the living make the decisions now.” A new green point appears on Channa Grove: “Where the vigil stays alive, even a dry stump can preserve a bud within itself.” The novel closes with seven brief concluding maxims, its final voice: drowned names rise and return home; the

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Chapter 200 — Guardians of the Names (The Novel's Final Chapter)

stone speaks because everybody’s name has been written on it; the crocodile has gone but the child’s hand remains, asking for names; when the village remembers its history, the coconut tree bears fruit again; truth germinates and the name catches fire. The last maxim declares: “This story does not end here. It lives in the mouths that say, ‘I am here.’”

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SECTION / खण्ड

Appendices

Three appendices: the folk encyclopaedia, the songs, and the philosophical inner narrative.

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Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

The introductory note explains that extensive material on local culture, which was condensed to keep the main story of Chapter Zero moving quickly, is preserved here in its original sequence. The appendix's first section, an essay in prose, describes the defining qualities of Garh Narikel's folk knowledge and culture. These include (1) oral transmission—from grandmother to granddaughter, from mother to daughter, from one lived experience to another; (2) collective ownership—no single individual owns a song, because its creator is the community; (3) rootedness in place—the river, soil and trees belong to Garh Narikel's particular geography; and (4) a flowing and changing form—tradition stays alive precisely because it does not

Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

remain immobile: the boat and bullock cart now share their world with relief boats, bridges and mobile-phone messages. The essay examines geography, soil, cow-dung-plastered courtyards, the soundscape of splashes and call-and-response, the seasonal cycle, and the cultural importance of intervals in daily life. It explores the division of labour among carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, leatherworkers, Doms and others, while questioning social inequality: if a rite is incomplete without a drum, why is the person who makes that drum denied honour? Further subjects include *ilam* (knowledge acquired through bodily experience), the relationship between work songs and rhythm, the multiple levels of truth in oral testimony, the moral

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Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

ideals of heroic narratives, the practical role played by songs, the range of emotional settings, conversational language, refrains and repeated lines. The essay ends by depicting the novel’s principal characters—Nand Aruni, Ujjwal Jha, Ba, Ananya and Aruni—as living heirs of this tradition. It declares *A Water Burial Among the Crocodiles* a modern epic of that folk culture, with a closing sentence that leads directly to the novel’s opening chapter, “Kabaddi at Channa Grove.”

The considerably longer second section pairs each cultural occasion with a short *khissa*, a prose account of a story, often involving Ananya, Aruni, Ba, Saryu, Nand Aruni or Ujjwal Jha, and a corresponding *geet*, a complete song set to a folk tune. There

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Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

are approximately sixty to seventy such pairs, together encompassing Garh Narikel’s entire cycle of life. Places and domestic objects include bricks from ruined buildings, a lamp in the sacred village enclosure, an old well, the moon reflected in a pool and a red turban at the ghat. Water journeys comprise rowing, towing boats and gathering fishing nets. Childhood occasions include lullabies, first hair-cutting, sacred-thread ceremonies and naming rituals. The agricultural cycle covers cutting earth, repairing embankments, dredging ponds, selecting seeds, ploughing, making field boundaries, waiting for rain, weeding, irrigation, detecting crop diseases, harvesting, carrying bundles, threshing, winnowing and storage. Other topics

Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

include fishing and tending animals; spinning wheels and oil presses; craftsmen’s tools and the weekly market; drought and famine; marriage rituals such as *gauna*, married life, wedding songs satirizing dowry, women’s ironic songs and the decoration of ceremonial gifts. Pregnancy, motherhood, the wisdom of old age, plastering courtyards, stories recited during vows, sounds from the kitchen, small acts of vigilance over animals and birds, Mithila painting, and earthen ritual objects also appear. Religious occasions include Madhushravani, Sama-Chakeva, worship of Bhagavati, household gods, village deities and the sacred enclosure, Dharmaraj, Shiva songs called *nachari*, Vishnu-Hari songs, Durga Puja immersion, Surya-Chhath,

Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

marsiya-jharni and the narratives of fakirs. The last groups concern oral literary forms—riddles, nicknames, exaggeration, mimicry, improvised rhyming, paradoxical *ulatbansi* verse, storytelling gatherings and call-and-response—and the protection of Garh Narikel's culture when people migrate to towns and distant lands.

Each story-and-song pairing holds a social or ethical lesson: justice in the distribution of irrigation water, respect for women's labour in weeding and Bhagavati songs, protection of the poor person's share during storage and drought, resistance to dowry, shared responsibility for repairing embankments and maintaining sacred communal spaces, and the importance of names in naming ceremonies and Dharmaraj

Appendix 1 — The Folk Encyclopaedia of Garh Narikel

traditions. Taken as a whole, the appendix provides the cultural roots and setting of the novel’s central concerns—name, community and the dignity of labour—whose traces appear as brief folk songs throughout the main narrative.

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Appendix 2 — The Original Songs of the Unnamed Planet Episode

The introduction explains that the “Unnamed Planet” episode in Chapters 101–104 of the main narrative was compressed into a concentrated dream-parable. The original folk songs associated with it are preserved here without alteration. This appendix is a collection of songs rather than a prose story, and the emotional landscapes of its four symbolic chapters unfold through those songs.

Chapter 101, “The Invitation from an Unnamed Planet,” depicts the village preparing to travel in response to a distant planet’s call. A song asks what the travellers should take. The answer is not money or weapons but “the scent of earth, a mother’s song and the lamp of a name.” In another song the planet itself asks what they will bring; they

Appendix 2 — The Original Songs of the Unnamed Planet Episode

answer with the breath of names, the smell of soil and a child’s hand. A symbolic scene follows: from the dust of the village, children’s kabaddi game rises as far as the orbits of the stars. When a child cries “Present,” a crack appears in an invisible glass wall, as though the Earth’s culture of naming were echoing throughout the distant universe.

Chapter 102, “Kabaddi Among the Planets,” expands the game into a metaphor with four turns: for Earth, for humanity, for justice and for coexistence. The players are urged to hold their breath, call out names and never forget their roots. In a second song Ananya writes that the boundary has moved far from Earth but their breath has not broken. The rule remains: “Whose memory does not

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Appendix 2 — The Original Songs of the Unnamed Planet Episode

break, that person's step stands firm." A child calls not "kabaddi" this time but "Present," and the first crack shines in the invisible wall.

Chapter 103, "The Reading of Names on the Unnamed Planet," gives the image of a "swing of names" stretched among the stars, with one end held by the ancestors and the other by a child. It is woven of three strands: memory, love and responsibility. Another song says that where there are no names, life's breath remains half-complete; in houses identified only by numbers, human beings are sorrowful. As soon as names are pronounced before the unnamed wall, cracks appear. Returning to Earth, the child says, "Here is my world."

Chapter 104, "Garh Narikel Chooses Earth Again," provides the

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Appendix 2 — The Original Songs of the Unnamed Planet Episode

symbolic conclusion: the decision to choose one’s own mud over a palace of glass. The songs insist that choosing Earth is not a mark of poverty but proof of love: here are the sweat of labour and the dignity of people. Running away would be cowardice; changing the world would be love. The concluding song makes a collective declaration: “We have chosen you, Earth; again and again we have chosen Earth.” The fragrance of the Kamala-Balan, a breached embankment, one’s own air, soil and threshold of names are valued above numbered homes and contracts for oxygen. The closing statement says this is not the last page but “the place of the next watch.” In sum, the appendix extends the novel’s central philosophy—names, memory, attachment

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Appendix 2 — The Original Songs of the Unnamed Planet Episode

to the soil and collective responsibility—to a cosmic scale within a science-fiction-like frame. It presents the vigil over names as a universal ethical principle, not one confined to a village boundary.

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

The introduction makes clear that the main chapters retain short “philosophical undertones,” appearing in one or two lines at the end of each chapter. The original extended classical examples and philosophical principles are preserved here, chapter by chapter, from Chapter 57 to Chapter 200, in 144 sections. In miniature narrative form this appendix presents the conceptual framework of Navya-Nyaya philosophy, particularly the epistemology of Acharya Gangesha Upadhyaya’s *Tattvachintamani* and its tradition of commentaries.

The opening sections, corresponding to Chapters 57–76, take the form of a partly fictionalized biography of Gangesha. As a child in Garh Narikel’s library, he hears a question about the unfinished last page of

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

a *kadambari*: an auspicious invocation is meant to remove obstacles, not to guarantee a book’s completion. Troubled by the caste-based red marks in a genealogical register, he begins to think about truth grounded in valid evidence. Beside the lamp of a leatherworker woman he learns the difference between the real properties of an object and the social label attached to someone’s birth. Sitting beside the doorway of the school in his maternal uncle’s village, filling a smoking pipe while listening, he learns logic. A folk narrative of his encounter with a tantric practitioner at a cremation ground raises the question of what makes knowledge valid.

These biographical sections also contain parallel examples involving modern

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

characters in the novel—Kamala, Madhav, Raghav, Chandrapal, Satyavrat Mehta, Meera and Devika. They include the mistaken appearance of silver in a shell, in Madhav’s story, with the theories of *akhyati* and *anyathakhyati*, and the illustration of a yellow conch shell seen by a jaundiced person, with its theory of perceptual defect.

Most of the middle and later sections, approximately Chapters 80–200, use five recurring narrative patterns: “a discussion arose in the village square”; “the teacher posed a question in the classroom”; “two pupils argued in the gurukul courtyard”; “the disciple found an abstract definition hard to understand, and the teacher imagined an incident”; and “a traveller recounted an experience.” These

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

five structures recur, each time filled with the matter of a different Nyaya principle. The topics progress through perception, memory, recognition, *tattva* and “this-ness” (*idanta*), secondary signification (*lakshana*), the meaning of the sixth-case or genitive relation (*shashthyartha*), the collective *dvandva* compound, the derivation of undesirable consequences (*anishtapadana*), fallacious reasons (*hetvabhasa*), qualifier–qualified relationships, knowledge of absence, self-luminosity of consciousness, and differences among Mimamsakas, Naiyayikas and Prabhakaras. Complex questions of Navya-Nyaya epistemology are frequently explained through familiar illustrations: a pot, shell-silver, the king’s man, a blue lotus, smoke

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

and fire, or the proposition that the members of the Garga family are eating.

At the end of each section a corresponding “philosophical principle” is identified in parentheses. In the related chapter of the main novel, that principle appears in condensed form as a “philosophical undertone.” Thus the appendix aligns the sequence of the novel’s chapters, 57–200—especially its investigations concerning Dhruvesh, Madhukar and Maheshwar—with a parallel course of epistemology based on *Tattvachintamani*. Behind every investigative turn involving names, evidence, memory or identity, the subtle architecture of classical reasoning can be discerned. The final sections, Chapters 186–200, close with disagreements involving Mandana and the

Appendix 3 — The Original Inner Narrative of Nyaya Philosophy

later Naiyayika and Prabhakara positions. The appendix ends alongside the novel’s last chapter, “Guardians of the Names.”

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WORK / कृति

02 Kurukshetram of the Inner Mind

216 Chapters · 18 Parvas · 7 Kandas

SECTION / खण्ड

For the Reader

02 Kurukshetram of the Inner Mind

For the Reader

These chapter-by-chapter synopses are not a substitute for the original novel; they are a companion for following its narrative sequence. Each chapter’s original title, its parva and its Ramayana kanda have been preserved. Where the investigation remains incomplete in the original, or a character deliberately defers a decision, that uncertainty is also preserved here.

SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Chapters 1–12 · Names, memory, family, and the first crises at the river landing.

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Chapter 1 — The Kitchen of the Dead

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

In Videhpur, a digital record declares the living Sarita dead, while a new prescription is issued in the name of her husband, who died seventeen years ago. Their daughter Naira keeps the evidence of the two discrepancies separately and begins the correction process. Sarita raises questions about privacy, livelihood and everyday labour.

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Chapter 2 — Twenty-Seven Names

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Sarita shows Naira twenty-seven names entered on an old sheet. Newly added names, their dates and their sources raise questions about the list. Naira resolves to keep this inquiry separate from other administrative disputes and to investigate each name with regard to the named person's consent and safety.

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Chapter 3 — Time at the Square

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

At the railway square, disputes arise over Fakira’s movements, permission to enter and fees taken without receipts. He records what he has seen separately from what he has heard and considers the dangers of the riverboat route. The right to account for one’s travelling time and earnings becomes more important than a public map of the roads.

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Chapter 4 — The River's First Home

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

In ancient Hastinapur, Satyavati wins the right to make her own decisions through her labour with the river, boats and fish. At the ghat in present-day Videhpur, Urmila and other workers set conditions for their belongings, earnings and use of the landing place. Naira records their testimony separately from unverified administrative claims.

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Chapter 5 — Janaka's Measurement

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

In Janaka’s time, construction of a new royal residence threatens to close an old path. The workers’ experience corrects misplaced stakes and inaccurate measurements. In the modern town, too, Kiran demonstrates the practical difficulties of carrying goods. Correct measurement of land is not merely a line on paper; it concerns people’s everyday freedom of movement.

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Chapter 6 — The Arithmetic of a Household

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Sarita’s old household ledger reveals a history of unrecorded domestic labour beside the accounts for rice, oil, medicines and rent. Questions of tenants’ rights arise in relation to a public well and the boundaries of donated land. Naira waits for fresh testimony rather than adding conjecture to the documents available.

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Chapter 7 — A Bench of Five Generations

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Shakuntala arrives at Sarita’s home carrying an old bench associated with five generations and papers relating to work with clay. Family memory, thumbprints taken without consent, inheritance and the granddaughter’s education become subjects of discussion. The competing claims are written down distinctly, leaving room for the next generation to make independent choices.

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Chapter 8 — The Letter from Simatirtha

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

A private letter sent from Simatirtha is delivered to its authorized recipient. Ramvati, Ramani and other women demand separate wages, rest and respect for makhana cultivation and water-related labour. Naira keeps the private correspondence apart from public testimony about labour, leaving the unresolved payment dispute open.

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Chapter 9 — The Blocked Water Channel

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Near Barki Pond, a former outlet of a blocked water channel is thought to have been found. Tara, Aditi and local workers collect evidence relating to measurements, the safety of the soil and a temporary footpath. The channel is not opened immediately, but a formal process of inspection and safe access begins.

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Chapter 10 — The Shadow of a Name

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Discrepancies emerge among the land-names of Purnadhar, the warehouse wall and an old survey register. Naira does not treat photographs, administrative documents and her own indistinct impressions as identical kinds of evidence. Before a photograph on Sanket’s phone is published, questions arise about permission and the identities of other people in the image.

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Chapter 11 — My Phone, My Conditions

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

Sanket photographs a red mark on the warehouse, but refrains from publishing because other people appear in the picture and its context is incomplete. Naira explains the difference among consent, visible facts and inference. In communal surveying the phone becomes a young person’s independent tool, not a means of sensationalism.

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Chapter 12 — The Town Behind the Ghat

Parva 1 · Adi | Balakanda

A public map of the ghat and a map drawn by residents give different accounts of paths, fishing nets and leases. Ramani, Tara and Naira demand certified copies, but the title documents are not immediately supplied. Behind the closed landing place, the unequal relationship between livelihoods and public geography becomes visible.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

Chapters 13–24 · Representation, privacy, humiliation, and displacement.

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Chapter 13 — The Woman Pronounced Dead

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

At a relief-distribution meeting, the living Sarita is announced as dead. She speaks for herself in public, while Naira pursues the correction of the false entry as a separate process. The distinction between ceremonial status in an assembly and actual voting rights foreshadows Ruhani’s next struggle.

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Chapter 14 — The Representative's Chair

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

Ruhani is given an honoured chair as a ‘representative’ at a community meeting but no right to vote as a member. She demands that this difference be entered in the minutes and that the private list of shelter residents remain protected. Champa stipulates that no consent may be given on her behalf while she is absent.

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Chapter 15 — Draupadi's Question

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

In the assembly of Hastinapur, Draupadi asks whether anyone had the right to wager away her freedom; those in high office avoid answering. In modern Videhpur, the lesson is that separate persons’ petitions and evidence must not be folded into one accusation. The voice and consent of the person concerned become central to public decisions.

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Chapter 16 — The Silence After Vikarna

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

Vikarna supports Draupadi’s unanswered question in the Hastinapur assembly, but the assembly’s collective silence persists. At a Videhpur meeting, Amala challenges an error in her name in the wage register. Distributing copies of the committee minutes to several people prevents a later false claim of ‘unanimous agreement.’

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Chapter 17 — The Cost of Kaikeyi's Promise

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

In Ayodhya, Kaikeyi, Manthara and Bharata’s anxieties about succession bring both a promise and its real cost into view. In Videhpur, it is workers who must fulfil promises made about schools, shelters and hospitals. Naira records the difference between ‘the one who makes a promise’ and ‘the one who bears its burden.’

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Chapter 18 — Urmila's Night

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

As preparations are made for Lakshmana’s departure to the forest, Urmila asks about the worth of the domestic labour she will be left to perform and of her own wishes. A modern Urmila who transports hospital linen obtains written recognition of her wages for night shifts. The attempt to conceal working hours and produce a false day’s accounting is stopped.

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Chapter 19 — Champa's Message

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

An extract from Champa’s private message is cut out and used at a meeting. She personally lodges an objection and demands that misuse of her private and treatment-related information cease. Examination of the copy register and the source of the sealed envelope remains pending.

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Chapter 20 — Publication in Haste

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

Naira publishes some of Mahesh’s information without adequately protecting its context. Even without naming him, the report may identify Mahesh, endangering his family. Naira acknowledges her haste and re-examines the limits of publication and the permission of her source.

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Chapter 21 — Whose Voice?

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

Padma, Naira and Champa distinguish the source of audio evidence, a speaker’s ownership of their words and the meaning of a voice heard only in part. Immediate action on the particular accusation against Ruhani is suspended and the original recording remains secure. Hearing someone’s voice is not treated as permission to broadcast it.

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Chapter 22 — The Order About the House

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

An administrative order increases uncertainty over contractors’ payments and the security of homes. The displacement, possessions and approval of shelter arrangements for Champa, Gauri and other families are recorded separately. Naira does not regard her own contractual dispute as grounds for journalistic authority over every household’s crisis.

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Chapter 23 — Bharata's Refusal

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

In Ayodhya, Bharata rejects the decision about succession made out of his mother’s fear. At a modern shelter, Ruhani provides food and temporary space to a displaced traveller while maintaining the distinction between permission to repair, ownership and a permanent lease. Shelter is protection, not a right of occupation.

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Chapter 24 — The Veranda Outside

Parva 2 · Sabha | Ayodhyakanda

The possibility of a lock being put on Champa’s room, Badri’s incomplete rehabilitation and repairs to Sarita’s veranda present three distinct housing crises. Local women work out practical arrangements for taps, tarpaulin and space. Naira keeps each household’s application separate and secure rather than making anyone’s private documents public.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

Chapters 25–36 · Shelter, mistaken appearances, access to education, and itinerant life

Chapter 25 — An Empty Place on the Train

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

At the railway square, Fakira’s hours of earning, Javed’s space for performances, and the shortage of water at Sarita’s house become separate conflicts over time. Sanket makes room in the day’s timetable for the time each person needs. No space described as ‘empty’ is treated as available for someone else’s unpaid labour.

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Chapter 26 — Guha’s Riverbank

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

In the episodes set on Guha’s riverbank and at the present-day landing place, the boatman Hira makes decisions about the boat’s load, the rising water level, and permission to travel. The Nat performers’ time on stage, the children’s school hours, and Fakira’s hearing time are also taken into account. Sanket restores the boatman’s place to sit in his drawing.

Chapter 27 — Shabari’s Dawn

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

While welcoming visitors to her hermitage, Shabari safeguards the labour and the right to time of the other women there. In Videhpur, the sacks of grain, unpaid wages, and the work of those tending the cooking fires are counted. Hospitality comes to mean equal respect for labour, not the expectation that attendants must wait without payment.

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Chapter 28 — Hidimba's Agreement

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

When deciding on her relationship with Bhima, Hidimba lays down conditions concerning the forest, her family, and her own autonomy. At the modern forest gate, itinerant families and workers from a closed factory file separate applications concerning the use of a shared path, wages, and confidential personal details. An agreement is reached without imposing a false uniformity upon them.

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Chapter 29 — Child Thief

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

An incomplete viral video spreads the rumour that Janaki has stolen a child. Meanwhile, Lata’s son Mithun actually goes missing. Naira establishes separate records for correcting the context of the misleading footage and for the genuine search for the child; no blanket accusation is directed at an entire community.

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Chapter 30 — Ahalya's Voice

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

Lata continues searching for Mithun while a wrongly attributed photograph accusing the Kanjar community is removed from the market. Ahalya of ancient times demands the right to tell the story of her experience in her own voice. Refuting a rumour is not the same as bringing the missing child home, but it does halt an unjust accusation.

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Chapter 31 — Ekalavya’s Lesson

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

The episode of Ekalavya’s training separates the knowledge gained through practice, tools, and safe targets from elite recognition. In a veranda in Videhpur, itinerant children learn letters and drawing. Jatan’s reversed letters are corrected, but permanent admission to school and a settled place for the family’s camp remain uncertain.

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Chapter 32 — ‘Now, Then’—For Whom?

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

Mrinal’s question raises the learner’s rights within the ‘athato’ inquiry associated with the Bhamati tradition. In Videhpur, the school admission of Reva’s child and Chanda’s wage dispute follow separate procedures. The school does not confuse temporary attendance with an official register entry or with actual access to education.

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Chapter 33 — The Lamp and the Paper

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

At an ancient place of learning, Mrinal, Lohana, and Bhamati account for the light, paper, and labour required to copy manuscripts. At the modern school, questions arise about a rain-soaked roof, safe repairs, and wages owed to women workers. The material labour behind the production and transmission of knowledge becomes visible.

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Chapter 34 — The Unseen Cause

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

Hema presents a privately held copy of an old record concerning the excavation or clearing of a pond, but its authenticity remains limited without the original record. In Udayana’s philosophical debate, the necessary and sufficient conditions of a cause are examined separately. Naira avoids mistaking similar-looking shadows for proof that they belong to the same object.

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Chapter 35 — Identifying the Gavaya

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

In the search for Mithun, an attempt is made to identify a culprit from the resemblance between two blurred photographs. Naira records similarity of appearance, definite identification, and proof of a crime as distinct matters. When assistance to the itinerant Rajo is threatened because two addresses appear in Rajo’s records, a clear rule is demanded; the search and the wage claim continue.

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Chapter 36 — The School Outside

Parva 3 · Vana | Aranyakanda

Jatan’s soaked exercise book and the unsafe veranda of the school expose the physical obstacles to learning. Padma and Sanket conduct a practical exercise concerning paths for people with differing abilities and needs. A temporary wooden support is provided, but water testing and a permanent demarcation of the school premises are still outstanding.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Chapters 37–48 · The identification of labour, occupational registers, and safe construction

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Chapter 37 — The Cook’s Name

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Questions concerning the cost of food, wages, and the choice available to those eating it emerge alongside the cook’s daily tasks. A connection is drawn between the concealed identities of the Virata Parva and the service designations assigned to modern workers. The work of preparing food cannot be made invisible simply by calling it ‘service.’

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Chapter 38 — Brihannala’s Classroom

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Through Brihannala’s classroom, the boundaries of education, identity, and respect are discussed. In the teaching conducted on the present-day veranda, translation between languages, communication through signs, and the student’s consent become important. A classroom becomes a place for hearing pupils’ questions, not merely for displaying a teacher’s authority.

Chapter 39 — The Weaver’s Due

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

In the labour of the Tanti and other weavers, yarn, measurement, time, and payment are accounted for separately. Parvati claims credit for her own weaving and for women’s labour. Opposition to absorbing an individual artisan’s remuneration into the vague language of ‘public cooperation’ advances the narrative.

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Chapter 40 — The Cloth Register

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

The hospital linen register raises questions about the distinct responsibilities of those who wash the cloth, those who deliver it, and those who store it. Urmila demands that incorrect entries be reconciled with the actual number of garments. The mere appearance of the same vehicle or receipt is not allowed to turn every transaction into a single alleged offence.

Chapter 41 — The Carpenter’s Signature

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Lalit refuses to sign a bill for a repair ramp whose safety has not been tested. Expertise concerning a vehicle’s wheel, a wooden plank, and drainage is examined separately. Even at the risk of financial loss, Lalit refuses to issue a false certificate of safety that could conceal the danger of an accident.

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Chapter 42 — The Future of Clay

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Shakuntala the potter raises questions about access to the clay-working site, shared use of the kiln, debt, and outstanding payments. Her granddaughter enters a new school; she is not obliged to take up the family craft. The future of clay is connected both to workers' rights and to the next generation's freedom of choice.

Chapter 43 — The Brassworker and the Goldsmith

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Meena the brassworker checks the actual number of brass vessels repaired for the hospital; Kamala the goldsmith seeks correction of a woman’s name in an old transaction. A distinction emerges between a family’s inherited oil-press and the debt of memory involved in deciding whether to sell it. An item that has not been adequately checked is not returned.

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Chapter 44 — The Blacksmith’s Tools

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Harinarayan the blacksmith records separate orders, safety requirements, and prices for four kinds of implements. Questions arise about interest in a pawn account and verification of a receipt bearing a worker’s thumbprint. His workshop clarifies the limits of responsibility for the use of tools and for the people affected by those tools.

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Chapter 45 — The Julaha's Consignment

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Yusuf the Julaha distinguishes cloth woven on his own loom from unfamiliar goods in an incoming consignment. He records the correct shipment, the advance payment being withheld, and the loss in transport separately. His son helps prepare a digital inventory while retaining his independent wish to train in electronics.

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Chapter 46 — Washerman, Dyer, and Cotton Carder

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Urmila, Sakina, and Rahim examine the separate work registers of the washerman, dyer, and cotton carder. A matching vehicle number in hospital and market records is not treated as proof of wrongdoing. With separate payments due for each stage of labour, evidence concerning the child-related rumour, the goods register, and the water lease is preserved independently.

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Chapter 47 — Measuring the Gate

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

Hira measures the actual loads carried by boats and carts at the gate, along with the water depth and the gradient. Urmila's need to deliver hospital linen on time conflicts with the conditions necessary for a safe route. The inspection has still to reconcile the nicknames, personal identities, and payments appearing in the original wage register.

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Chapter 48 — Three Reasons for Disguise

Parva 4 · Virata | Aranyakanda

A pseudonym such as ‘Red Cap’ is found in the gate’s wage register. The story of Sairandhri in Viratanagar shows that a person may conceal an identity for different reasons. Naira requests the original register; it is proposed that workers’ payments should not be withheld while the gate’s safety inspection is suspended.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Chapters 49–60 · Unequal alliances, the price of labour, and water agreements

Chapter 49 — The Price of Cooperation

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Shyam and Tara contribute local measurements and the labour of using their tools to temporary safety work at the gate. The municipality’s ‘voluntary cooperation’ form leaves their knowledge and their entitlement to wages unclear. A public order specifies the safety work, its price, and the limits of final authorization; the dispute over a permanent path through the fields remains unresolved.

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Chapter 50 — Sugriva’s Fear

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

The narrative turns to Sugriva’s fear in Kishkindha and his alliance with Rama. At the present-day gate, Tara objects to an arrangement that merely transfers the danger onto another footpath. She records the risk, the gains and losses of individual households, and the wages owed to local workers in three separate sections.

Chapter 51 — Tara’s Reckoning

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Tara brings water measurements, path width, human labour, and hearings for affected households into a single reckoning. The conflicting memories of Rama, Sugriva, and Vali reveal the danger of a one-sided decision. Although technical certification is still incomplete, the revised notice records the credit and remuneration due for local consultation.

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Chapter 52 — Angada’s Disagreement

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Alongside Angada’s dissent and Sugriva’s royal responsibilities arises a dispute over removing the camp of an itinerant Nat family. Gauri produces receipts for expenses, and the children ask for a shaded place in which to study. Objections concerning the stage, permission to record video, and temporary accommodation are written down separately.

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Chapter 53 — Ruhani’s Key

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Ruhani moves beyond holding the keys to the shelter and acknowledges the women residents’ right to go out and take their belongings with them. Remuneration for work and proper credit by name are settled for performances involving Javed, Chandra, and Hari. The shelter’s power to provide safety is not converted into a claim of ownership.

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Chapter 54 — A Leader Without Ritual

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

An attempt is made to issue commands in the leader’s name while arranging the shelter’s stores and communal meals. Dulari rejects pressure to surrender a debt claim in exchange for relief. Alongside Udayana’s philosophical dialogue, the rights of each worker to wages, consent, and refusal are written into the terms of collective work.

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Chapter 55 — The Mother of the Missing Child

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Lata has the journey ticket, chronology, and family statements relating to her missing son Mithun checked again. It is decided not to turn the old child-theft rumour into an allegation against a new suspect. The revised search details reach the authorized office, but Mithun’s whereabouts remain unknown.

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Chapter 56 — Medicine Given in Charity

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Jamuna accepts both the treatment actually received at the hospital and the benefit of donor Devavrata’s assistance fund, but prevents the public disclosure of her private health information. Examination of the hospital’s public procurement is kept distinct from patients’ confidentiality. At the same time, questions arise about alternative space for Bela’s livelihood, which is affected by road measurements.

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Chapter 57 — Janaka and the People

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

In the measurement of fields, channels, and drainage, Ramesh, Dhani, Meena, and the fish workers each present their own gains and losses. Through the relationship between Janaka and his people, the account insists that accurate governmental measurements must incorporate farmers’ knowledge. Tara keeps the calculations of payments due, blocked water, and unsettled land rights separate.

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Chapter 58 — The Web of Causes

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Comparing the flow from Makhaniya Dabra, the obstruction made by sacks, and measurements from the flood period, Tara rejects an easy explanation based on a single cause. Ramani and the fish workers stipulate conditions concerning leases and wages. The water committee on the opposite bank seeks a joint inspection, while asking that names identifying private fields and homes be circulated only on a restricted basis.

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Chapter 59 — The Envoy’s Conditions

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

Respecting the restricted circulation of an envoy’s letter, Hira fixes conditions for measuring boat loads and crossing safely. River names appearing in folk songs are not treated as direct measurements of present water levels. The women on the opposite bank raise questions about taps, sample testing, and the price of labour; terms for a joint inspection begin to take shape.

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Chapter 60 — The First Agreement Breaks Down

Parva 5 · Udyoga | Kishkindhakanda

The first agreement over drainage stalls because of land measurements, incomplete flood data, and compensation for damage to fields. Ramesh’s family grants limited permission to place earth temporarily, not a permanent right. A way remains open for further dialogue on the condition that amounts claimed and payments actually made are calculated separately.

SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Chapters 61–72 · The burden of promises, evidence, and warnings at the hospital

Chapter 61 — Ganga’s Conditions

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

In the relationship between Ganga and Shantanu, the acceptance of conditions, the birth and death of children, and Devavrata’s return reveal a profound ethical cost. Naira preserves a copy of the conditions under which the modern water agreement failed. The chapter treats accepting a condition, understanding it, and living with its consequences as three different acts.

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Chapter 62 — Bhishma’s Vow

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Devavrata makes a severe vow to secure the future of Satyavati’s children and receives the name Bhishma. Satyavati questions how this vow will affect women in later generations. In Videhpur, Tara warns against future misuse of the agreement document.

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Chapter 63 — Amba’s Time

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Amba of Kashi is deprived of the outcome of her own choice by Bhishma’s military intervention and Shalva’s refusal. Amba records as separate stages the thwarting of her choice, the disregard of her wishes, and the failure to obtain justice. The account resists reducing her long struggle to a single tale of revenge.

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Chapter 64 — Shikhandi’s Decision

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Shikhandi raises questions about training in arms, personal identity, and the consequences of the coming war. In Videhpur, Raghav signs to confirm that materials have been delivered, but refuses to endorse unverified claims about where they were used or whether safety tests were performed. Responsibility for an earlier order is distinguished from responsibility for the work actually carried out.

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Chapter 65 — The Hospital’s Old Wing

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

The leaking roof, blocked stairway, and danger of transferring patients in the hospital’s old wing become apparent. Salma, Aniruddha, and Aditi examine safe accommodation for each patient and investigate the reasons repairs are needed. A notice announcing the building’s closure does not prove that patients have actually been moved; drainage and materials still require inspection.

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Chapter 66 — Krishna and Arjuna’s Pause

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

At Kurukshetra, Arjuna halts his chariot at the beginning of the war and questions his own decision. At the modern hospital, Urmila’s linen vehicle becomes stuck at a safety barrier. Naira refuses to treat an indistinct voice or an incomplete signature as a conclusion; a decision must be made between temporary safety measures and the immediate need for treatment.

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Chapter 67 — Seeing from a Distance

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Fakira gives a corrected account of a sound he heard behind the hospital, making clear that he did not see its source. An incorrect entry declaring him dead on his travel pass has still not been corrected. The distance between truthful testimony and a living person’s administrative recognition is exposed.

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Chapter 68 — A Copy of the Warning

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

The chronology of Aditi’s earlier warning letter, its receipt by the office, and an incomplete reinspection is examined. Ratan’s old memories of the water and the workers’ practical experiences concern facts from different periods. Naira does not present her own private impressions as evidence from the official file.

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Chapter 69 — What an Absence Means

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

The lack of a reinspection signature in the warning register does not yet establish whether the work was performed. Suraj, whose field has been lost to erosion, has the principal, interest, and penalty on his debt separated. A correction to Mahesh’s news report is requested, but printing is not stopped.

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Chapter 70 — Mahesh’s Night

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Clues to Mahesh’s identity in a publication begin to expose his family, and questioning reaches his daughter. Mahesh’s wife submits an application for protection, while Naira struggles with her responsibility for publishing the information. Immediate patrolling is approved, but comprehensive confidential protection for the family remains unresolved.

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Chapter 71 — Death and Documents

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

Mahesh dies in hospital after a violent attack. Kabir ensures that uncertain colour details and the number of figures actually seen are recorded cautiously in the incident account. The original documents are secured for investigation; Mahesh's daughter lives through her grief with her drawing of the river and her father's private handwriting.

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Chapter 72 — Sanjaya’s Distance

Parva 6 · Bhishma | Sundarakanda

In the investigation of Mahesh’s death, Kabir separates what was directly seen, what was heard, what was inferred, and what remains unverified. The limited field of a witness’s perception is placed beside Sanjaya’s account of seeing a distant war. Naira keeps the post-mortem report, materials register, boat slip, and water committee’s letter as distinct records.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Chapters 73–84 · Wages, identities, manuscripts, and the search for a missing child

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Chapter 73 — The Landing at Simatirtha

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

At Simatirtha, the boat's planking, the charges for unloading, and the time workers spend waiting are examined separately. Padma checks the translation of Kumudi's statement against the original words. In her search for Mithun, Lata keeps copies of documents apart from records of what was directly witnessed, and obtains an appointment to inspect the original register.

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Chapter 74 — Drona's Due

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Alongside the account of Drona's guru-dakshina and the right to knowledge, the unpaid wages of Shanti, who unloads boats, and Chanda, a migrant worker, come to light. Pressure to sign without reading a page marked 'all payments received' is stopped. Lata finds no new clue to Mithun's whereabouts, but receives a definite time to examine the original register.

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Chapter 75 — The Same Final Digit

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Because the digit 'seven' appears in different records, some people attempt to establish a connection to a single crime. Kabir demonstrates that it refers to an address in one place, a token in another, and a serial number elsewhere. Without comparing the original records, Naira refuses to combine the investigation into Mahesh's murder, the search for Mithun, and the treatment papers into a single case.

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Chapter 76 — After Ekalavya

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

In the discussion of the right to knowledge after Ekalavya, Pratima makes her own decisions about safety and training. At Simatirtha, questions arise about the savings in Binu's account, Ramvati's two identity cards, and language assistance for migrant labourers. Examination of personal dues and verification of formal names proceed separately.

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Chapter 77 — Trijata's Message

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

In the Ashoka grove, Trijata brings Sita news about uncertain circumstances without giving assurances that cannot be established. At Simatirtha, a discrepancy in translation is discovered: 'temporary route testing' has been changed into 'no objection to permanent use.' Hira demands to hear the full translation before deciding what his consent would mean.

Chapter 78 — Mandodari's Home

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

In Lanka, amid reports of war, Mandodari experiences the cost that decisions of state impose on household food and labour. The school in Videhpur accepts responsibility for publishing an unfounded allegation of child abduction against a community on its noticeboard. A correction is published, while the earlier false notice remains marked as erroneous in the record.

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Chapter 79 — Resemblance of Faces

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

A wrong name is attached to a picture because its subject looks like Sarayu. Janaki's family insists on the person's original identification. In market dealings and trade across the border, a similar-looking face or object is likewise not accepted as identical evidence. The search for Mithun continues.

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Chapter 80 — The Weaver's Second Ledger

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Yusuf prepares separate accounts for the genuine lengths of cloth from his loom and for a suspicious consignment marked with red thread. In the fish market, a dispute arises over determining the usable portion of Vinod's woven mat by actual measurement. Lata receives confirmation of the time at which she may inspect the original records concerning Mithun, but she does not find the child.

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Chapter 81 — The Child's Next Location

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

A slip from the railway square referring to the 'next stop' leads the search for Mithun to another possible location. Naira checks the information cautiously. Meanwhile, the return home of migrant Gunja, wages owed to Kedar, and payments due to Durga's small food business develop as separate narrative threads.

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Chapter 82 — Maithili's Page

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Maithili compares her earlier handwriting with pages of a book circulated under Ishan's name. The issue of proper credit for intellectual contributions and editorial work arises. She keeps a private rumour about Kabir's birth separate from the public dispute about the book; the sequential examination of the original pages continues.

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Chapter 83 — Sarita's Labour

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Sarita preserves pages recording her domestic life, calculations, and examples. Maithili sees how Sarita's practical labour and understanding have been suppressed in examples used for philosophical argument. Rather than having her name added without authorization, Sarita asks for proper acknowledgment of the copies she wrote herself.

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Chapter 84 — The Teacher's Acknowledgment

Parva 7 · Drona | Sundarakanda

Ishan moves towards acknowledging the old pages of the book, Maithili's corrections, and the problem of unattributed credit. In Mangari's wage receipt, the payment field is blank, so a record of attendance alone does not prove payment. The teacher's responsibility for appropriating credit is examined alongside his knowledge.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Chapters 85–96 · Birth and upbringing, altered identities, and the twenty-seven names

Chapter 85 — Radha's Labour

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

The work of the chariot and the labour of raising a child performed by Radha, who brought up Karna, come into view. In the present, agricultural worker Kiran verifies weights and debts. Kabir does not regard the uncertain record of his birth and the care given to him by his mother as alternatives that cancel each other out.

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Chapter 86 — The Original Page

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Sarita opens the original page containing twenty-seven names, and Naira prepares a comparison sheet for the twenty-six entries that may be disclosed. The last name remains protected and its place left blank; the limits of public access are written down. At the landing place, Ramani refuses restrictions on women's passage by boat unless the receipts are shown.

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Chapter 87 — Five Altered Identities

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Five personal descriptions are found to have been changed or wrongly attached, but each person's identity, exposure to risk, and conditions for issuing a corrected record differ. Kamli expresses fear that an old name may be made public again. Nasim protects her private customers' ledger against a red extract circulating on phones.

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Chapter 88 — Fourteen Discrepancies

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Rama and Naira classify fourteen discrepancies in the records: names, social identities, occupations, death markers, and other entries all require different supporting grounds. No conclusion is drawn from a computer entry without checking an original copy. Ramani refuses to sign without seeing a complete copy of the original register board.

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Chapter 89 — Four Alive, Four Dead

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

An official file is examined for an anomaly: four living people are marked dead, while transactions remain active under the names of four deceased people. Rama clarifies their administrative status, while Sharda corrects an erroneous calculation of mortgage interest and offers the customer a refund. Matching numbers do not establish that two records refer to the same person.

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Chapter 90 — Subhadra's Conditions

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Subhadra retains control over the sequence and limits within which old papers concerning Kabir's birth may be opened. Kabir wants the right to ask about his birth without diminishing his relationship with the mother who raised him. The family's private history does not immediately become a public statement.

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Chapter 91 — The Convenient Error

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Behind a proposal to dispose of the correction to Sarita's death entry as an ordinary 'accounting error' lies the question of earlier change records. Rama asks for the sequence of original alterations. Nahid's maternal-side land and debt are likewise not treated as though agreement could simply be assumed for convenience.

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Chapter 92 — The Refutation of the Accusation

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

The false public accusation of child theft against Janaki and Sarayu is formally rebutted, but the effects of the original rumour's circulation remain. Misuse of a photograph of a customer's home is stopped. During the child-protection inquiry, the stages of Gunja's return and a possible link with another transport slip are examined separately.

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Chapter 93 — A Connection Between Consignments

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Hospital supplies are halted when the distributor's seal and label on a medicine box fail to match. Without laboratory testing, the goods are not declared 'counterfeit.' Separate reasons are recorded for the return of Madhav's consignment and for its payment; Naira accepts only connections that have been verified.

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Chapter 94 — The Rights of a Foster Parent

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

While pursuing old questions about his birth, Kabir preserves the unquestioned life bond with the mother who raised him. Separate issues of permission arise over the use of vehicles for passenger transport and for hospital supplies. Kabir raises questions for his next conversation with Subhadra but refrains from reaching an immediate final conclusion.

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Chapter 95 — The Order to Kill

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

In the investigation into Mahesh's murder, a rented room used by a transport intermediary, an earlier driver's statement, and an account of threats come to light. Police investigate the source of the order, but the distinction between a direct allegation and words heard from someone else remains unresolved. A private payment schedule connected with the twenty-seven names also remains under restricted access.

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Chapter 96 — Reconciling the Twenty-Seven

Parva 8 · Karna | Sundarakanda

Sarita, Rama, and Naira compare the original page containing twenty-seven names with administrative records, entry by entry. They establish separate boundaries for public particulars, private names, and rights of access. Definitive answers about the order to murder Mahesh, the correction of Sarita's record, and the search for Mithun are still outstanding.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

Chapters 97–108 · Emergency agreements, hospital repairs, and rising water

Chapter 97 — Shalya's Loyalty

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

Parallel to the ancient episode of Shalya's loyalty and choice of allegiance, five separate emergency conditions are reviewed in the town. No comprehensive agreement has been reached on vehicles, warehouse supplies, water measurements, food, and records. Only the safe movement of one patient becomes possible; Naira corrects an exaggerated news headline.

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Chapter 98 — Vibhishana's Path

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

Vibhishana chooses his course between the royal duty of Lanka and his responsibilities to his household. At the modern gate, Hira and Tara agree to a limited vehicle trial only after drainage has been measured for safety. The drivers' and labourers' strike and the full dispute over expenses remain matters for a separate hearing.

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Chapter 99 — Kumbhakarna Awakens

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

The awakening of Kumbhakarna exposes a conflict between orders given in wartime and individual judgment. In Videhpur, Devi faces a conflict between training and the responsibility of caring for her mother. Kamlesh admits that repairs remain incomplete and postpones a decision on the safe use of the materials.

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Chapter 100 — The Second Agreement

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

The second agreement sets out five documents in writing, concerning patient transport, wages, supplies, the route, and objections. The declaration of an emergency cannot be used to cancel the fares or payments owed to cart-pullers and other workers. A public copy and the original objection are preserved separately.

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Chapter 101 — The Patient's Time

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

In the hospital's old wing, with a leaking roof and limited exits, the actual time needed to move patients is calculated. Salma coordinates their need to remain with family members and arrangements for safe vehicles. Outside, Tara and Hira measure the temporary crossing planks and the weakened wall once again.

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Chapter 102 — Layers of Repair

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

When Gomati removes the top layer of cement from a repair, she discovers weak filling beneath and layers soaked by water. Tara examines billed quantities, actual loads of earth, and on-site inspection as separate matters. Aditi withdraws her earlier claim that minor repairs would be sufficient.

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Chapter 103 — The Affirmative Argument

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

In Udayana's philosophical discussion, positive inference is distinguished from a competing possibility. Rani's team inspects sanitation work near the hospital, blocked exits, and missing equipment. The fact that work has been assigned does not establish that the drainage is safe.

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Chapter 104 — The Question of Capacity

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

The safe carrying capacity of Noorjahan's vehicle and Sugni's water survey raise questions about the real capacity to undertake work. The women gather evidence from water marks, silt, and experience inside homes as separate sources. A survey cannot itself open a drain, but it provides a basis for a safe decision.

Chapter 105 — The Makeshift Bridge

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

Tara, Shyam, Lalit, and Hira inspect the knots, load, gradient, and water level of a temporary bamboo bridge. Even after the prescribed tests, it is not declared ready for unrestricted use. The wages owed for half a working day omitted from one labourer's account are corrected; technical safety and labour accounting proceed together.

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Chapter 106 — Acknowledging the Treatment

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

During the rains of 2039, Aniruddha accepts the need to correct an erroneous entry in an old medicine chest's hospital record. A telephone call said to have involved pressure has yet to be verified. While patients continue receiving treatment, a newly authenticated correction sheet is added instead of tearing out the old details.

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Chapter 107 — Five Signatures

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

Devavrata's warehouse is opened under limited rules, and essential supplies are delivered for the hospital and shelter. The five-signature procedure specifies food supplies, fuel, night shifts, and amounts owed to workers. Responsibility for relief is not converted into unpaid labour.

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Chapter 108 — Beyond the Water-Level Mark

Parva 9 · Shalya | Yuddhakanda

The red marker on Hira's water gauge goes under water, and pressure increases on the stream and embankment. Tara and local residents check sandbags, warning bamboo poles, and boat ropes. The delivery of hospital medicines, food for the shelter, and watch over rising water continue simultaneously.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Chapters 109–120 · The night of the flood, rescue, witnesses, and the failing hospital wing

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Chapter 109 — A Truce in the Night

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

During the flood night, Ruhani and Rukhsana cautiously manage food at the shelter, the names of arrivals, and safety notices. News that one family is safe is not presented as an announcement that all routes are open. The night's arrangement keeps a clear account of every shift and its remuneration.

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Chapter 110 — The Warehouse Opens

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Devavrata has a second room of the warehouse opened for authorized distribution of necessary supplies. Although the water level in the outer river is falling, the source of standing water behind the warehouse is unclear. Inspection, written receipts, and the actual route by which supplies reach people acquire separate importance.

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Chapter 111 — The Boat's Capacity

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

At the landing place, boats are marked safe after inspection of their loads, planks, ropes, and numbers of passengers. Keshari decides to repair an old boat and settle the account of labour debt rather than sell it. Permission for each boat is time-limited, and responsibility for relief boats is recorded separately.

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Chapter 112 — Ishan's Hand

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Ishan's injured hand and his authorship rights over the book are discussed. Maithili seeks recognition of her corrections as an independent intellectual contribution, not merely as 'questions.' Boat repairs continue while the dispute over Ishan's original pages and uncredited work opens again.

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Chapter 113 — Ashwatthama's Night

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

During the night at Kurukshetra, Ashwatthama's violence causes the deaths of people asleep and leaves others wounded. Survivors take charge of recording names, attending to bodies, and informing families. Departing from a narrative of victory, the chapter brings forward the consequences of violence against non-combatants at night and the difficulties of bearing witness.

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Chapter 114 — Medicine and the Remaining Breath

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

In the hospital's old wing, wet sacks and an unsafe threshold obstruct the movement of patients. Aniruddha is also injured and experiences the position of someone who needs treatment while also having to give evidence about timing. A safe outside detour is identified; the old doorway is not treated as a regular route.

Chapter 115 — Permission to Photograph

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

When Sanket photographs the risks in the old wing, he requests specific permission for use of the images. In Rama's presence, an eyewitness statement, a structural inspection, and permission to publish photographs are prepared as three distinct documents. A picture may serve as evidence of a disaster, but that does not make everyone in it publicly available without consent.

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Chapter 116 — The Old Wing

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Gomati, Lalit, and Aditi examine weak soil, walls, and the possible risk of collapse in the old wing. A proposal for immediate demolition is rejected until the supports have been examined. A fixed exclusion boundary and a safe place from which to provide assistance are established.

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Chapter 117 — Naira's Choice

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Naira makes the difficult decision to remain at the hospital emergency site, gathering information about changing water measurements and routes for patients. Sugni notices movement in an outside stake but clearly states the limits of what she can know about dangers beneath the ground indoors. Naira's decision is reassessed with every new warning.

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Chapter 118 — Urmila's Tired Hands

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

With exhausted hands, Urmila tends a female patient's bed and clothing as the structure deteriorates. Aditi records the event time only as an estimate, to be checked later against three sources. Urmila chooses the immediate work of saving the patient over filling out a receipt.

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Chapter 119 — The Distance of Delay

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Evidence that Urmila and the female patient have escaped from inside the collapsed section does not arrive in time. Naira refuses to fill in a blank receipt field prematurely. Hira and the rescue team decide on an alternative safe route and vehicle capacity; the arrival of other survivors is confirmed separately.

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Chapter 120 — Before Dawn

Parva 10 · Sauptika | Yuddhakanda

Before dawn, the rescue team weighs the possibility of entry amid jammed supports and increasing danger. Naira refuses to declare Urmila alive or dead on the sole basis of the last sound heard from her. Any rescue decision remains subject to scientific examination of the structure.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

Chapters 121–132 · Death, grief, private records, and the rights of survivors

Chapter 121 — Confirmation of Names

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

After the hospital rescue operation, verified news of the deaths of Naira and Urmila reaches their families. Sarita, who was once declared dead while still alive, understands the danger of misusing death certificates. This time the documentary confirmation names an actual, irreparable loss; Kabir and Sarita begin to grieve.

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Chapter 122 — The Last Body

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

In the mortuary, identification of the last body, its clothing, the time, and the family's consent are examined closely. Devi is injured and is not pressed to give an immediate statement. The identities of three people have been verified; identification of the fourth remains incomplete, and the final list is not filled by guesswork.

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Chapter 123 — Gandhari's Question

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

Walking among the dead after the war, Gandhari mourns her sons while raising the question of losses endured by other families who have not been heard. The search for kitchen workers and people who held no military rank also assumes importance. Gandhari refuses to treat her grief as a royal mother as the only grief that matters.

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Chapter 124 — Inside Mandodari

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

After Ravana's downfall, Mandodari manages mourning, distribution of food, and the security of female attendants within Lanka's royal household. Vibhishana's arrival is not a celebration of victory but the difficult beginning of a new administration. The question arises whether an elderly woman who wishes to return home may be detained in the name of collective guilt.

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Chapter 125 — Kunti's Admission

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

After the war, Kunti reveals the truth of Karna's birth. The Pandavas refuse to regard the upbringing given by Radha and Adhiratha as less significant than a relation by birth. Kunti acknowledges that most of the life experiences of the child she left behind remained unknown to her; truth arriving late cannot undo all the harm.

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Chapter 126 — The Portion of Rice

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

As Sarita serves rice from the hearth, she confronts Naira's absence. Kabir has every right to eat at home, but he is not made into someone who must fill Naira's 'empty place.' In grief, love, irritation, memory, and the everyday act of eating each persist in their own form.

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Chapter 127 — The Guilt of Surviving

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

The injured Aniruddha and Kabir struggle with guilt at having survived; memories beginning with 'if only' cannot reverse Naira's death. A real inquiry into responsibility is kept separate from imagined self-punishment born of grief. Kabir returns to practical acts of cooking and caring for his family.

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Chapter 128 — Champa's Treatment

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

Champa seeks counselling and treatment for injury and psychological trauma. Ruhani recognizes that, even if a name is concealed, the particular time of treatment could identify a person. Champa keeps her medical records and eyewitness statement in separate envelopes, retaining the right to choose when she will give her account.

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Chapter 129 — Ruhani's List

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

Instead of yielding to pressure to create a public register of shelter residents, Ruhani prepares a restricted care register for emergencies involving fire and water. With Zubaida and Rukhsana, she sets the rules for a shared key, the number of meals, and the limits on private details. A safety list does not become a public instrument of surveillance.

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Chapter 130 — Draupadi's Remaining Days

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

After the war, Draupadi faces the needs of food, an injured child, Kunti, and the different griefs of women during the days that remain to her. Her life is no longer only a story of humiliation or war. The ordinary right to choose how much she herself wishes to eat becomes a central expression of her remaining life.

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Chapter 131 — Sita's Fire

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

In Lanka, the proposal arises to test Sita's innocence through fire. Sita questions the demand that her life and decisions become objects of judgment in a public court of suspicion. Amid the search for injured people and missing relatives in the Ashoka grove, her experience becomes an independent story of a woman's autonomy.

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Chapter 132 — Beyond the Number

Parva 11 · Stri | Yuddhakanda

The number of deaths entered in the hospital register is verified and finalized, but claims involving assistance, housing, compensation, and private rituals remain open separately. Rama maintains distinct registers for government allocations and voluntary religious expenses. Completing the death count does not complete the accounting of families' entitlements.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Chapters 133–144 · Governance, relief, legal responsibility, and shelter

Chapter 133 — Who Will Govern?

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

In 2040, after the disaster, a discussion arises over who will assume leadership of the administration and its committees. Aniruddha rejects the idea that medical expertise automatically entitles him to a vote or to leadership. The right to dissent and the procedure for changing leaders are put in writing.

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Chapter 134 — Yudhishthira's Reluctance

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

After the war, Yudhishthira expresses reluctance to wear the crown. Vidura draws his attention, alongside the duties of kingship, to the outstanding questions concerning kitchen workers, animals, the injured, and their families. Before the throne is accepted, a public hearing on the war's actual costs becomes important.

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Chapter 135 — Bhishma's Bed of Arrows

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Yudhishthira comes to Bhishma on his bed of arrows with questions about governance and responsibility. The dues owed to informal caregivers and to those who have tended injured animals are also mentioned. Draupadi says that deciding whose voice will be heard at the first hearing is itself a question of justice.

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Chapter 136 — The First Statement

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Sarita gives her statement at the public inquiry, but carefully explains the meaning of earlier words and the limits of the sources. Badri's family refuses to sign a declaration treating a temporary plot as 'permanent rehabilitation.' Aditi decides to re-examine the earlier measurement report bearing her own signature.

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Chapter 137 — The Old Report

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Aditi compares the old measuring tape, her earlier signature, and new firsthand evidence. Questions are also raised about wages for the work performed safely by cleaning labourers. The physical causes of the accident, neglect of duty, illicit gain, and allegations of deliberate violence are assigned to separate lines of inquiry.

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Chapter 138 — Separate Files for Responsibility

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Gomati opens four investigation files so that structural failure, neglect of responsibility, personal gain, and violent conspiracy are not collapsed into one allegation. A suspicious shipment of goods alone does not prove that a drainage outlet was intentionally blocked. Clear distinctions are maintained among witnesses, injured persons, and the accused.

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Chapter 139 — The Return of Reasoning

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

In Udayana's philosophical debate, the proposed inference from several chains of causes to a single conscious controller is disputed. Similarly, in the contemporary inquiry, even when the four files appear to overlap, the evidence must remain separately examined. The philosophical answer to a controversy cannot substitute for evidence of administrative responsibility.

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Chapter 140 — Action and Cause

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Gomati and Rama examine separately the authority to issue orders, workers' oral warnings, failures to act, and the consequences of the accident. An inferred statement is not turned into a definite written notice. Relief assistance, legal proceedings, and administrative answers move ahead as three distinct processes.

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Chapter 141 — Assistance and Litigation

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

A dispute arises over a medical-assistance slip that includes both a donation of medicine and a concealed condition requiring a lawsuit to be withdrawn. Devavrata says that his institution will provide the original ledger for the supplies it issued for examination. The principle is established that accepting help does not constitute agreement to surrender one's legal rights.

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Chapter 142 — The Source of the Medicines

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

The origins, seals, and supply records of three medicine boxes at the hospital are checked against one another. Verified medicines are put to use; the box of uncertain origin remains sealed. A sack of bedding wrongly withheld on suspicion from Rahim is returned. Incomplete financial claims of different workers and patients remain unresolved.

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Chapter 143 — Rules of the Shelter

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

Ruhani revises the rules governing the shelter's shared key and confidential care for residents. Keeping the door open in a crisis does not give an institution complete control over the choices of those dependent on it. With Zubaida, Rukhsana, and other women participating, the right to safe shelter is shared rather than monopolized.

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Chapter 144 — The Desire to Learn

Parva 12 · Shanti | Uttarakanda

In a small room at the shelter, Padma teaches children to ask questions with an empty bowl, a receipt, and a measuring string. The children's actual curiosity matters beyond the school's formal attendance figures. A little girl writes with her own hand the answer to the question, 'May I study?'

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Chapters 145–156 · Education, labour rights, water, and consent

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Chapter 145 — The Ration Queue

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

In the ration queue, Rukhsana, Dulari, and other women distinguish the correct weighing of grain, the opportunity for those coming from far away to speak, and pressure to waive debts. Dulari's signature acknowledging distribution does not become a document releasing anyone from debt. Some incorrect names are corrected, but old arrears still remain.

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Chapter 146 — Fakira's Pass

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Fakira continues struggling to correct the false entry of his death on his travel pass. Alongside this, the distinction emerges between Farid's personal dues and the family's shared debt. Padma and Sanket prepare a portable signboard that will allow children in the school to give answers in different ways.

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Chapter 147 — Sanket's Classroom

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Using colours, raised thread, wooden marks, and letters, Sanket makes learning aids for children with different abilities. Devi advises on health-related symbols. Each pupil shows what they have understood in their own way; questions also arise about payment for the materials and for the labour of teaching.

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Chapter 148 — Padma's Fees

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Padma keeps separate ledgers for enrolment, teachers' hours, and fees for linguistic mediation. A proposal is accepted to seek fair remuneration from the institutions requesting the service instead of imposing charges on poor children's families. Education through signs is not allowed to turn teachers' invisible work into 'free assistance.'

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Chapter 149 — Janaki's Refutation

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Janaki raises the demand for a formal retraction of the school's wrongly published allegation and asks about its financial consequences. Rajo refuses to let old wages owed for transport work be absorbed into relief payments. When the old viral video circulates again, Janaki preserves evidence of its date and source.

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Chapter 150 — Faces and Evidence

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Sajid and Janaki check the sources of a cut-down video spreading under successive new names, but they do not make the child's face public. Reva claims the actual expenses of school admission. The classroom returns to the question of who is allowed to study and who was previously prevented from doing so.

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Chapter 151 — The Lesson of Shambuka

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Through the story of Shambuka, questions of caste-based exclusion from education and the right to knowledge arise at school. Jatan seeks answers with his new admission slip in hand. Meanwhile, the water committee continues dealing with unresolved questions about boat repairs, drinking water from the tap, and measuring and naming the river.

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Chapter 152 — The Outstanding Payment for Clay

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Shakuntala makes separate claims for broken earthen vessels, access to the kiln, and unpaid remuneration. At school, her granddaughter uses questions and drawings to examine the idea of the potter's wheel's 'fixed centre.' A written order for payment arrives, but the money has not yet reached the account.

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Chapter 153 — Measuring the River

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

Hira examines the Tilwaha River's old and new water marks against their seasons and dates. Women from affected households participate in deciding where silt dredged from the pond should be deposited. An earlier estimate is not treated as immutable truth; new measurements are recorded.

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Chapter 154 — The Document of Consent

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

At the pond landing, permission for fishing leases comes into conflict with limits on public access. Renu, Ramani, Ruhani, and Rama distinguish consent for water use, private photographs, sealed envelopes, and public documents. Public steps leading to the water do not mean anyone's body or personal information is available for unrestricted use.

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Chapter 155 — Testimony of Violence

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

A confidential account of violence following an incident at the landing reaches the shelter. The affected man wishes to meet a friend but does not authorize disclosure of the full details. His right to write 'Not yet' on the blank page of his own statement is recognized.

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Chapter 156 — An Exception to the Rules

Parva 13 · Anushasana | Uttarakanda

A limited exception is made to the shelter's ordinary rules for confidential medical care and statements. Ruhani provides for a separate secure meeting place, a screen, staff time, and clearly specified expenses. The victim's request, 'Listen, but not in front of everyone,' is not turned into a public spectacle.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Chapters 157–168 · Travel, credit for knowledge, wages, and community maps

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Chapter 157 — The Path of the Released Horse

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

The wandering horse of the Ashvamedha opens questions about the expansion of the state and the consent of other territories. In the modern journey, each village's independent decisions, access, and wages due are recorded separately. Correcting an error in the market is not treated as proof of innocence in every other complaint.

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Chapter 158 — Arjuna's Identity

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

In Manipur, the Ashvamedha horse and Arjuna's identity provoke conflict over lineage, war, and local autonomy. During the modern camp's travels, private envelopes and public expenditures are kept apart. Durga asserts her right to choose new customers against a trader's claim to a monopoly.

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Chapter 159 — The Travelling Archive

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Through the travelling camp's records, Sarita brings copies documenting people's rights from village to village. Children's routes to school, the locations of documents, and individual consent are examined in each area. After the journey she sees Naira's empty chair, but keeps the next page of the camp's register open.

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Chapter 160 — Sarita's Contribution

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Sarita ties up in four separate bundles copies of philosophical pages, the sources of examples, expenses of domestic labour, and receipts from the travelling camp. Independent credit for both her intellectual and domestic contributions is raised. In a new agreement for the use of farmland, the family examines a condition requiring it to surrender all management rights.

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Chapter 161 — Maithili's Own Name

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Maithili produces evidence of her authorial revisions from old proof pages. Discussion advances about placing her own name alongside Ishan's and respecting her right to raise questions. At the same time, night worker Lakhan's attendance record and his actual shift are the subject of separate testimony.

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Chapter 162 — The Knower's Claim

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

In the tradition of studying Udayana, the credibility of the person claiming to know comes into question; simply wiping away a mistake does not erase the original trace. Maithili insists that reliable testimony from people without prestige be considered in determining credit. Niru demonstrates separate tests of the quality and price of three objects at a communal kiln.

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Chapter 163 — An Old Book, a New Preface

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

A new preface to the old book rewrites the historical account of the contributions of Ishan, Maithili, and other assistants. In rehabilitation, a remote plot of the same area is not treated as offering equal possibilities for living. The wage claim of Urmila's family remains separate from the cost of printing the book.

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Chapter 164 — Urmila's Dues

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Sarita has Urmila's death certificate, partial bank deposits, old wage register, and remaining dues examined separately. Urmila's sister produces evidence that money was actually received. Payment to one worker does not close the outstanding amount owed to others; the dead worker's earnings remain the family's right.

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Chapter 165 — The Meaning of a Sentence

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

Padma and the family discuss the precise meaning of the official phrase 'closure of the account following death.' A worker's unpaid earnings do not automatically vanish at death. Limited consents concerning the bank, land, measurements, and household property are read according to their different meanings.

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Chapter 166 — The Weavers' Market

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

At the weavers' market, Yusuf, Parvati, Pavitra, and Sakina settle separate receipts for materials, colours, wages, and partnerships. While selling an old oil press, Bindeshwari preserves the family's measuring vessels and ledgers. In the new market, commercial freedom and obligations towards memory remain side by side.

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Chapter 167 — Measurement Without an Emperor

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

At the panchayat, seasonal water measurements and field maps are redrawn using local residents' experience. Tara identifies the seasons, paths used by animals, wages, and actual drainage. Simply making an online copy available is not enough: those whose knowledge was used must receive a copy useful to them.

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Chapter 168 — The Copy That Returns

Parva 14 · Ashvamedha | Uttarakanda

The panchayat delivers copies of the approved seasonal map to affected people. Badri's objection to describing his rehabilitation as 'permanent' delays a grant. Rama keeps open the questions of the copy's practical use, its ownership, and the next stages of the rights process.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Chapters 169–180 · Old age, personal autonomy, grief, and refuge

Chapter 169 — Dhritarashtra's Hand

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

In old age, Dhritarashtra raises questions about his right to make his own decisions even while receiving care. At the modern panchayat, an elderly woman sets conditions limiting access to photographs of her home, her private suffering, and corrected records. Rama checks whether the elder's consent is genuinely her own, rather than simply an instruction chosen for her family's convenience.

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Chapter 170 — Gandhari's Departure

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, and Sanjaya leave the royal residence and take the path to the forest. Despite their fear, the journey is a decision taken of their own will. On a modern elderly person's bus journey, fare, keys, and the difficulties of caregiving become separate realities; epic and contemporary events are not presented as the same kind of historical evidence.

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Chapter 171 — Kunti's Remaining Words

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

As she departs for the forest, Kunti acknowledges the burden that remains from her silence concerning Karna. Gandhari reminds her that facing one's own burden is not the same as imposing it on another. A contemporary elderly woman likewise chooses for herself her health arrangements and the number of days she will stay while travelling.

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Chapter 172 — Ishan's Room

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Ishan makes decisions about a private room in the library and access to open study. In Maithili's reply, public reading remains possible, but their former marital intimacy is not automatically restored. The separate boundaries of rights over the book and those of a personal relationship are respected.

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Chapter 173 — Maithili's Distance

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Maithili retains a key to her separate study and continues to live at a distance. Organizers want a photograph of the 'reunited literary couple,' but she refuses to turn her relationship into a ceremonial performance. The possibility of genuine cooperation remains open where Champa's practical need for medicine is concerned.

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Chapter 174 — Mother's Medicine

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Champa arranges safe confirmation of an unclear prescription for her mother instead of buying medicine on a guess. She does not allow her earnings and romantic relationship to be entirely absorbed into the duty of caring for her mother. In her meeting with Amresh, equal rights concerning time, choice, and everyday expenses are established.

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Chapter 175 — Kabir's Letter

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Kabir preserves a private, unsent letter addressed to Naira. Amid an old drawer, relationships, and unfinished sentences, he does not transform grief into a public declaration. A new form of the relationship with Sarita survives through the ordinary arrangements of morning and respect for each other's freedom.

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Chapter 176 — Sarita's Morning

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

On the mornings after Naira's death, Sarita continues tending the stove, coping with knee pain, and attending to the school and meals. She remembers her daughter's favourite food without making every act an obligatory repetition in Naira's name. The return of daily life does not end grief; it makes living alongside grief possible.

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Chapter 177 — An Elder's Consent

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

Champa asks her elderly mother Savitri what she wants concerning her walking stick, treatment, and a visit to the fair. Savitri chooses to rest the following day. Even when care involves providing medical information, the older person's choices remain her own, while her daughter continues her paid work.

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Chapter 178 — Vidura's Path

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

The episode of Vidura's path in the forest hermitage raises questions about authority and ethical independence. In Videhpur, Phoolmati demands a right to decide questions involving her representation on the committee and the decline in fish prices. Listening to dissent at school is a public duty, while personal forgiveness remains a separate matter.

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Chapter 179 — Private Forgiveness

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

In the forest hermitage, Gandhari, Vidura, and Sanjaya distinguish private forgiveness from relationships of caregiving. Contemporary nomadic families form a limited alliance to prevent forced eviction, but do not oblige everyone to follow one path. A public appeal does not become a list recording private acts of forgiveness.

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Chapter 180 — Outside the Shelter

Parva 15 · Ashramavasika | Uttarakanda

The different needs of people living outside Ruhani's shelter, arriving temporarily, or returning after leaving become apparent. From the raised platform of the forest hermitage, Aruna protests the closure of her old access route to water. A relief centre cannot impose control over lives beyond its own boundaries.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Chapters 181–192 · Festivals, artisans, wages, and collective records

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Chapter 181 — The Yadavas' Festival

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Alongside the ancient episode of the Yadavas' festival, a contemporary dispute arises at the festival ground over the donor company's name, performers' voices, and craftspeople's design rights. Sumitra receives written acknowledgment of her sample, her share, and the conditions for testing. Full payment for Chandra's song is still awaited.

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Chapter 182 — A Day of Intoxication

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

In the intoxicated atmosphere of the festival, a young man's health deteriorates; Champa protects the privacy of his treatment. At the same time, a question arises about permission to use Suman's original design digitally. Public good wishes do not make a patient's medical details, or an artist's rights over a creation, freely available.

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Chapter 183 — The Memorial Contract

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

A new contract for the memorial sparks dispute over actual work cleaning the landing, the names of people involved, and credit for expenditure. A parallel between the triumphal emblems of ancient Dwaraka and the memory of a dead boatman brings collective acknowledgment to the fore. Rather than turning Naira's name into a glittering plaque, Sarita attends to people's outstanding dues.

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Chapter 184 — Ruhani's Choice

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

In the shelter's leadership election, Ruhani decides to relinquish control herself. Padma arranges accessible communication so that a deaf elderly member's vote can be understood. Jharna takes on the new responsibility; the donor company's revised conditions are not accepted without public review.

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Chapter 185 — The Terms of a Donation

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

The new chairperson, Jharna, examines donation letters from Shailaja's company and Devavrata's relief institution. Unacceptable conditions granting control to donors are separated out without withholding immediate medicine from a sick child. Limited assistance is received, but disputes over financial autonomy and future obligations remain open.

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Chapter 186 — Tara's Mistake

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Tara publicly acknowledges an error in an old shadow-copy and in her measurements, together with a correction. Saqib has the amounts for transport charges and wages, combined in a single receipt, separated. One person's admission of error is not proof of an entire conspiracy; a copy of the correction is preserved.

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Chapter 187 — The Kitchen's Deficit

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Rukhsana sets out the meal counts of the community kitchen and the financial deficit caused by workers' shifts over six days. A proposal to deny regular workers wages by calling them 'community volunteers' is opposed. While food service continues, records of hours, rates, and daily review are prepared.

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Chapter 188 — The Tool Market

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

In the market for tools, Harinarayan and Ajit determine the actual prices of boats, ropes, and repairs. Kamlesh seeks realistic instalments for the shop's additional security deposit. The episode of Balarama in Dwaraka brings out the difference between a family's emblem stamped on an object and the anonymous contribution of the worker who made it.

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Chapter 189 — Balarama's Withdrawal

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Balarama decides to distance himself from the royal family as violence breaks apart Dwaraka's festival. He understands that leaving does not erase previous responsibilities. In the modern tool market, Nazir continues to suffer the effects of an old, unverified allegation; a worker's reputation is not easily restored.

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Chapter 190 — The End of Krishna

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

The episode of Krishna's death unfolds amid the postwar disintegration of Dwaraka. In contemporary Videhpur, a closed forest gate obstructs a craftswoman's route to market and her income; a limited right of access is put in writing. Rather than give a divine justification for death, Sarita attends to concrete dues owed to people still alive.

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Chapter 191 — Not Everything Has Broken

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

After examining the collective dredging of the pond and payment to workers, Gomati sees that possibilities for reconstruction remain. Tara prepares three maps covering the rains, the winter crop season, and seasonal access. A new tender to appoint a 'central owner' of the community archive becomes a threat to its autonomy.

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Chapter 192 — Fear of a New Owner

Parva 16 · Mausala | Uttarakanda

Tara sees the threats to community copies, the means of making corrections, and local access in a tender for centralized ownership of digital records. The need to keep technical services running is also real. The community submits a written objection and plans to distribute copies among multiple custodians, including people in distant settlements.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Chapters 193–204 · Farewells, privacy, the journey, and the right of entry

Chapter 193 — Announcement of the Journey

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Yudhishthira transfers the succession to Parikshit and sets out on the great final journey. In the present, Tara and Sanket travel among villages carrying copies of records, while keeping each family's private consent and workers' wage conditions distinct. Postponing some journeys is also a responsible decision.

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Chapter 194 — Draupadi's Path

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

On the difficult path of the great departure, Draupadi's physical exhaustion and private memories of her sons emerge. Bhima supports her by the hand, but Draupadi does not rise again. The journey is no uninterrupted heroic ascent; it becomes the harsh experience of losing a companion.

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Chapter 195 — The Brothers' Distance

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

On the great departure, death and exhaustion increasingly separate the brothers, including Sahadeva and Arjuna. In his last moments, Arjuna wishes to be addressed as a 'brother' before being called a warrior. In the parallel modern world, separation among ordinary people and the precarious livelihood of the artist Javed continue.

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Chapter 196 — Fakira's Station

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

In 2042, Fakira objects to the unsafe freight entrance and faulty weighing machine at a new station. Rather than proclaiming his experience a definitive conclusion, he has the load measured again. Sarita's and Fakira's distinct living paths continue; the imagery of the great departure is not imposed on this journey.

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Chapter 197 — The First Storeroom

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Sarita opens the first room of the old shelter and checks the remaining supplies against authorized receipts. Maitri examines whether the archive's old designation 'closed' means goods were actually received or only that notice was issued. Separate responsibility is assigned for the room's key and the public supplies.

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Chapter 198 — The Dead Person's Phone

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Kabir considers permission and privacy before opening Naira's old phone. Rafiq mentions different spoken forms of the river's name and notes on sources kept by Naira. Preserving a dead person's voice does not require public release of all that person's private messages.

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Chapter 199 — A Story Without a Name

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

An unnamed person offers an envelope containing their story, but retains control over their name and who may gain access to it. Padma and Somri demand payment for the labour of translation. Telling a story and keeping one's personal identity confidential are not contradictory; an anonymous voice also has a right to be heard.

Chapter 200 — The Final Examination of Words

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Padma distinguishes four classes of statements: 'directly witnessed,' 'heard from others,' 'inferred,' and 'imagined.' Completion of a patient's transfer is not the same as the outcome of treatment or the end of a strike. Clarifying the limits of words to the reader, alongside distinct kinds of evidence and workers' voices, becomes the narrative's final examination.

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Chapter 201 — Farewell at Simatirtha

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

At Simatirtha's landing, Madhu and Shanti check the boat planks, the tests made for travel, and outstanding dues. Chanda treats her homecoming not as a reward but as an independent decision. A final claim concerning debt remains open; acknowledgment of payment without evidence is prevented.

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Chapter 202 — Kabir's Return

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

Kabir separately acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding his birth and his present relationship with the mother who raised him. A payment intermediary proposes a 'shared code,' but the families concerned ask for verified copies. Kabir returns to the ordinary task of buying salt for his mother at the market; the meaning of home endures.

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Chapter 203 — The Creature Who Accompanies

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

The dog accompanying Yudhishthira on his last journey becomes a question of loyalty and care for a vulnerable creature. In the present, Ruhani arranges a safe veranda, medicine, and supervision for an injured dog. No one turns the creature's protection into an entertaining spectacle; unresolved dues owed to human families continue separately.

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Chapter 204 — Not a Mountain but a Doorway

Parva 17 · Mahaprasthanika | Uttarakanda

In place of the symbolic mountain of the great departure, the actual doorway of Videhpur's school, its key, and the right of entry become central. Children work on repairing the door and making pictures. Along with a shared meal, responsibility for keeping the school open is passed to the next people.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

Chapters 205–216 · Listeners, narrative credit, memory, and shared responsibilities

Chapter 205 — The List of Heaven

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

Dispute arises over acknowledgment of unnamed cleaners, workers, and the dead on a memorial's roll of names. Sarita reminds everyone that a list is not a final, error-free gate to heaven: new evidence requires public correction and notice to affected families. No one may seize the right to represent a community without asking it.

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Chapter 206 — Uttara and Parikshit

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

The succession of Uttara and Parikshit raises questions about the future of the generation that survives. At the school, pressure arises to spend children's relief grants in the name of ritual observances. A child asks why surviving should become penance for someone else's guilt; Padma preserves the question.

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Chapter 207 — Janamejaya's Question

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

The story of Janamejaya's revenge and the interruption of his sacrifice is told at school. Rashid and other performers set separate permissions for rebroadcast, sale, and study of their sound performances. The listener's right to interrupt and ask questions is also part of the storytelling tradition.

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Chapter 208 — Ugrashrava's Listeners

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In Ugrashrava's storytelling, listeners offer variant inherited versions and interrupt with questions. In Videhpur, Chetan Bhat compares different manuscript pages. A storyteller's authority cannot erase listeners' dissent; the next recitation by Lava and Kusha is linked to the same question.

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Chapter 209 — The Recitation of Lava and Kusha

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In the story of Lava and Kusha and in a contemporary song, a singer's consent, variations in the text, and credit for new work are distinguished. Phoolmati removes an objectionable line for public singing, but preserves the original version for study. Children gain the right to give their experience new melodies and words.

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Chapter 210 — The Fourth Aphorism of the Bhamati

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

Studying the fourth aphorism of the Bhamati, 'tat tu samanvayat,' Mrinal keeps the text, interpretation, objections, and present-day questions distinct. Sarita refuses to regard the inscription of a dead worker's name on a memorial as settling unpaid wages. Reconciliation is not made into another name for silencing disagreement.

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Chapter 211 — Udayana's Remaining Argument

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In Udayana's remaining argument, due space is given both to questions from the opposing side and to the labour of the copyist. Hamida obtains a written decision preventing humiliating use of her song, but her payment is still outstanding. Intellectual respect and financial dues are separate obligations.

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Chapter 212 — Gangesha's Classroom

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In Gangesha's classroom, children ask whose lives should provide the examples being taught. Sarita insists that evidence concerning Urmila's work be recorded only for periods that have actually been verified. On the new title page of a philosophical book, credit for research assistance and kitchen copying is raised separately from editorial credit.

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Chapter 213 — Maithili's Own Voice

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

Maithili's independent voice and credit for her revisions are published, alongside an acknowledgment of her earlier mistakes. Accounts are kept of Sarita's intellectual and domestic labour, while incomplete payments remain explicitly recorded as unpaid. The school's right to education and the administrative process of registering births remain separate.

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Chapter 214 — Naira's Empty Place

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

At the ceremony remembering Naira, an attempt is made to turn her into an ideal person who always soothed everyone. Kabir protects the memory of her disagreements, mistakes, and living human character. Sarita does not alter the permission governing publication of Naira's private notebook and phone; the empty place is allowed to remain empty.

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Chapter 215 — The Distributed Archive

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In the collective dredging of the pond and distribution of archives, responsibility for copies is divided among three separate custodians. Gomati looks at safe routes for workers and the risks to children's access. The original investigation, unpaid dues withheld, and limits on private files remain open; no single person is given every key.

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Chapter 216 — Kurukshetram of the Inner Mind

Parva 18 · Svargarohana | Uttarakanda

In the final chapter, amid Sarita's stove and a shared meal, Tara, Kabir, Padma, Ruhani, and Gomati take responsibility for small, continuing tasks of the living. Naira's death remains an irreparable loss; her private notebook stays closed, and the children's school will reopen the following day. The novel ends not with a single manifesto proclaiming a conclusion, but with the continuity of food, labour, questions, and shared responsibilities.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Brief Conclusion to the Whole Narrative

02 Kurukshetram of the Inner Mind

Brief Conclusion to the Whole Narrative

The story begins with a digital error that declares the living Sarita dead, and develops through the twenty-seven names, privacy, wages owed for labour, the river landing's access routes, and the careful investigation of government records. Social conflicts connected to the time streams of the epics and philosophy become especially severe during the disaster. After the deaths of Naira and Urmila, grief is joined by the real responsibilities of justice, rehabilitation, credit for knowledge, and collective memory. In the final chapter, Naira's absence is not erased: through Sarita's stove, the children's school, and the shared archive, the unfinished work of the living continues.

WORK / कृति

03 · Navya Nyaya and the Offshore Gambling Network

100 Chapters · Eight Narrative Sections

SECTION / खण्ड

Complete Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

03 · Navya Nyaya and the Offshore Gambling Network

SECTION / खण्ड

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Chapters 001–013 · Initial evidentiary limits, seized digital material, and privilege

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Chapter 001 — Dawn at Garh N Arikel

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

At dawn in Garh N Arikel, investigating officer Aditya Jha studies seized digital material linked to an offshore gambling network and an order of the High Court. Malini Karn constructs a chronology of payments, websites, and customer identities, but foreign control has not been established. At a meeting in Delhi, Aditya resolves to keep the limits of evidence, inference, and non-availability distinct. That resolution becomes the foundation of his entire judicial struggle.

Chapter 002 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 2

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

In Delhi, Malini brings together numerous complaints, payment references, and digital indicators, but Aditya explains the distinction between resemblance and an established connection. Before the High Court, Vidyanand Mishra seeks protection for attorney–client privilege, while the state seeks lawful investigative access. Justice Arya orders a separate review team, an account of the reasons for confidentiality, and safeguards for the integrity of forensic images. Preparation for a special leave petition points to the next confrontation in the Supreme Court.

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Chapter 003 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 3

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Vidyanand Mishra files a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the High Court's order. Aditya and Malini check the timing of payments, device clocks, and the authenticity of access records; filing a petition does not itself amount to an order of stay. Journalist Ananya Kashyap also comes to appreciate the importance of reporting in accordance with the record rather than pursuing sensationalism. In its response, the state separately sets out the petition's assertions, the direct basis for them, inferences, gaps, and the judicial answer being sought.

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Chapter 004 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 4

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

As preparations proceed for a Supreme Court hearing, questions arise about the respective roles of the investigators, the independent review team, and legal advisers. Aditya prevents a hasty conclusion of control from the coincidence of digital timestamps, while Vidyanand seeks a balance between his client's interests and the accuracy of the record. The defence's late-night consultations and the listing of the petition show that the contest will turn not on the number of people involved but on the integrity of the procedure.

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Chapter 005 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 5

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Before the High Court, the sorting of seized material and the actual limits of the investigation team's access come under scrutiny. The fact that Devvrat technically entered the review area emerges: he might have been able to view the list, but there is no direct trace of his opening its contents. Aditya does not conceal this inconvenient fact and has a revised compliance statement filed. The basis of judicial trust becomes not the erasure of an error but its acknowledgment, together with its source and limits.

Chapter 006 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 6

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

The Ministry of Law asks Aditya and the investigation team for an evidence brief to reconstruct the state's position before the Supreme Court. The sources, connections, and limits of the seized ledger, access logs, hash comparisons, and privileged material are recorded separately. The officers agree to answer on the basis of points awaiting verification and procedural safeguards rather than broad allegations. A ministry note makes clear that the integrity of a record is not the same as the truth of what it says.

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Chapter 007 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 7

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

In a joint legal preparation at the ministry, the High Court's safeguards and the questions the Supreme Court might ask receive detailed scrutiny. A payment intermediary's response confirms certain matches, but the identity of the beneficiaries and the subsequent movement of money remain unverified. Raghav Sethia meets Vidyanand Mishra and expresses his concerns about his case. The chapter brings the state's legal strategy, pressure from a litigant, and Aditya's insistence on factual restraint into confrontation with one another.

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Chapter 008 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 8

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

The High Court distinguishes among the names in the seized ledger, the accounts associated with them, and actual control. Three witnesses emerge in different human circumstances: Deepnarayan's fear, former payments worker Naresh Mahto's expectation of reward, and Kusum's sense of guilt. Aditya says that the causes of fear, the influence of self-interest, and the legal significance of remorse must each be investigated independently. The court refuses to substitute a witness's emotional condition for a finding of criminal responsibility.

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Chapter 009 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 9

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Before Justice Arya, the central dispute becomes how to separate ordinary business records found in a lawyer's office from confidential legal advice. The state seeks access to investigable financial facts, while Vidyanand warns that the sorting process might expose legal strategy. The court indicates that the location or name of a file alone cannot determine whether it is privileged. Aditya applies the limits of evidence even when doing so runs against the conclusion he would prefer.

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Chapter 010 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 10

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

There is another hearing concerning the classification of privileged entries, the use of the investigation diary, and the status of sealed material. Limits are set on the use of authorized records connected with payment references and remote access. The court and investigation team emphasize that a case diary records proceedings; it is not independent proof of guilt. The mere existence of a confidential document does not automatically add weight to the assertions it contains.

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Chapter 011 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 11

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Malini and Aditya re-examine the correspondences among village complaints, mobile phones, and forensic images of seized devices. In her journalism, Ananya Kashyap learns to check facts at several levels rather than pursue sensationalism. A conversation with his mother in the village reminds Aditya of the difference between an object directly observed and the reality presumed to lie behind it. The materials point in a similar direction, but a common website, owner, or user has still not been proved.

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Chapter 012 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 12

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

In preparation for the Supreme Court, both the state and the defence clarify their positions on judicial orders, the sorting of evidence, and the limits of privilege. Vidyanand accepts that not everything kept in an advocate's office is protected, but insists that genuine legal advice and confidential exchanges with a client must remain secure. Through a childhood incident involving footprints, Aditya illustrates the difference between an observed mark and the person inferred from it. The proceedings move toward careful classification.

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Chapter 013 — The Shadow of Evidence — Chapter 13

01 · The Shadow of Evidence

Differences among the times of seizure, laboratory entry, and forensic imaging become points of challenge for the defence. Aditya distinguishes the hash value of the original verified image from that of the working copy, which can change during examination. Without investigation, the discrepancy in time is treated as proof neither of tampering nor of innocence. At the close of the first section on evidence, a method that preserves inconvenient facts prepares the ground for the next stage of inference.

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SECTION / खण्ड

02 · The Web of Inference

Chapters 014–026 · Correlating sources, witness accounts, and alternative explanations

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Chapter 014 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 1

02 · The Web of Inference

As the section on inference begins, the Ministry of Home Affairs asks the state for a clear strategy explaining how the indications relate to one another. Aditya keeps a small map of verified facts separate from a wider map of possible connections. In preparing the reply to the Supreme Court, the team separates three levels: lawful investigative power, procedural protection, and limited inference grounded in evidence. Blank spaces on the map are not opportunities to invent a story but questions requiring further examination.

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Chapter 015 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 2

02 · The Web of Inference

Malini obtains partial confirmation of some connections from a payment intermediary's response and administrative time records. Vidyanand's team seeks counterexamples to the state's proposed inferences. Aditya has every inference recorded under separate heads: direct basis, logical link, possible rebuttal, and the judicial conclusion sought. This discipline prevents supposed common operation from being presented as established ownership or criminal participation.

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Chapter 016 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 3

02 · The Web of Inference

In the Supreme Court, questions arise about the distinctions among suspicion, a specific accusation, and evidence; the court recognizes both the state's right to investigate and the protections owed to the defence. The differing statements, fears, interests, and memories of witnesses, including accounts assistant Manoj Mahto, enter the investigation. Nor is the date written on an old document assumed to be the time at which it was actually prepared. The central concern is to prevent collective suspicion from automatically acquiring the status of proof.

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Chapter 017 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 4

02 · The Web of Inference

Justice Arya examines the origins and purposes of different records. Business facts kept in an advocate's office do not automatically become legal advice, yet limits are necessary to prevent the review process from exposing protected communications. Malini avoids a decisive finding without the author field and the original source of the image. Vidyanand, too, refrains from the exaggeration of declaring all the material inadmissible on the basis of one weak connection.

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Chapter 018 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 5

02 · The Web of Inference

A limited inspection of three entries in a regional financial archive reveals certain matches in payment references. In court, a distinction emerges between the witness's original words and their expanded interpretation in the investigation diary. The state accepts that an exaggerated passage, written as though the diary's interpretation were a fact, must be corrected. The chapter establishes that a case diary may begin an inference, but it cannot be the final source of verification.

Chapter 019 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 6

02 · The Web of Inference

The defence files supplementary grounds in the Supreme Court, and the state prepares its response using a revised chronology. Of the many links among domain names, registrations, payment intermediaries, and administrative marks, some hold while others fail. Journalists try to draw political meaning from the absence of relief, but the judicial finding remains limited. Aditya insists on preserving the record of failed inferences as well.

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Chapter 020 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 7

02 · The Web of Inference

Before the Supreme Court, the wider defence team demonstrates the difference between using the same infrastructure and exercising common control. On his map, Aditya identifies the independent sources for websites, content-delivery services, domain registration, and payment routes. When an overbroad sentence is found in an earlier government draft, the history of its correction is disclosed. The court calls for more precise details of hashes, custody, and payment sources.

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Chapter 021 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 8

02 · The Web of Inference

Amid detailed objections from both the state and the defence, subpoenas, dates of service, digital working copies, and the chain-of-custody register are separately examined. The time shown on one automated record differs from the time of formal service; the reason for the three-minute gap remains uncertain. Aditya neither hides this gap nor makes it evidence of a crime. Investigation comes to mean allowing room for inconvenient alternative explanations.

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Chapter 022 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 9

02 · The Web of Inference

Senior officials want to present the state's case in forceful language, but Aditya removes the broad claim of an 'integrated offshore operation.' The available material shows only connections among certain elements that are still under examination. In the revised report, every source and every unanswered question receives a separate section. The view prevails that the state's reputation will be protected not by exaggerated statements but by a presentation consistent with the evidence.

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Chapter 023 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 10

02 · The Web of Inference

The Ministry of Home Affairs prepares to place the state's case before the authorized legal leadership in the Supreme Court. Vidyanand's private struggle intensifies because of his wife Shailaja's health and the financial worries surrounding her treatment. The state avoids calling an indication of remote administrative access definitive foreign control. Alongside the joint preparation by the Attorney General and Solicitor General, the tension between family crisis and professional duty continues.

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Chapter 024 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 11

02 · The Web of Inference

The Supreme Court again asks questions about the fear, payment references, and remorse of three witnesses. The wording of Manoj Mahto's recollection of a threat is corrected verbatim, and the state places that correction on the public record. The bench emphasizes the distinction among suspicion, accusation, and established fact. Vidyanand experiences a difficult ethical predicament between Shailaja's treatment, pressure from his client, and precise rebuttal in court.

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Chapter 025 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 12

02 · The Web of Inference

The High Court hears arguments concerning privilege over a communication containing mixed material. Legal analysis and separate commercial instructions may occur in the same document, but separating them cannot justify disclosing confidential advice. Justice Arya bars access by the original investigative team and permits only limited use of external timestamps. At the end of the section on inference, the chapter brings together protection of rights and lawful ways of obtaining facts.

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Chapter 026 — The Web of Inference — Chapter 13

02 · The Web of Inference

At the final hearing of the section on inference, Justice Arya directs that independent evidence, the interpretations contained in the investigation diary, confidential information relating to witness protection, and privileged material be kept in separate categories. The state promises also to retain the record of unsuccessful investigative leads in its diary. The court makes clear that judicial inspection of sealed material does not increase its factual weight. The revised record opens the way to the next comparisons based on analogy.

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SECTION / खण्ड

03 · The Map of Analogy

Chapters 027–039 · Website similarities and unproved common ownership

Chapter 027 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 1

03 · The Map of Analogy

In the section on analogy, Malini shows similarities between two websites in page layout, help messages, payment paths, and administrative structures. Aditya stresses the difference between a common service provider and common ownership. Independent intermediary records corroborate some payment similarities, but the ultimate beneficiary is still unknown. In the state's revised map, comparison provides a direction for investigation, not independent proof of an individual's guilt.

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Chapter 028 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 2

03 · The Map of Analogy

Of her first seventeen comparisons, Malini retains nine useful connections; the others have weakened because of ordinary shared services, incomplete metadata, or unsupported inference. The court insists that an alternative cause and a condition under which the comparison would fail be written beside every similarity. A common administrative contact may also result from a service provider's automated process. The state regards the reduced map as a genuine improvement, not a defeat for the investigation.

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Chapter 029 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 3

03 · The Map of Analogy

The evidentiary brief on analogy examines the uniformity of help messages, hash matches, and differences in the reading of copies. The Attorney General presents the state's revised map to the court. A copying or reading error is considered the more likely cause of one technical discrepancy, but the limits of any finding are left to the bench. For Aditya, removing a mistaken line in time increases the credibility of the evidence.

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Chapter 030 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 4

03 · The Map of Analogy

At the Ministry of Home Affairs, comparative links are divided into four categories: independently confirmed, based on similarity, accompanied by alternative explanations, and unsupported. Some officers want to combine many similarities into a decisive charge, but Aditya favours verifying where each line originated. They also consider how the Navya Nyaya concept of analogy can be expressed in the modern documentary language of a court. The goal is not to invoke the name of a philosophical school but to apply its method correctly.

Chapter 031 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 5

03 · The Map of Analogy

During the state's joint preparation, the initial language used to describe similarities is restricted. Aditya emphasizes the strength of a source rather than the prestige of public office. An opportunity arises to make a brief submission in the Supreme Court, where Attorney General Devvrat Sinha and Solicitor General Mrinal Dhar set out the revised method. A government guidance note establishes that the evidentiary weight of each line on a digital map must be stated separately.

Chapter 032 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 6

03 · The Map of Analogy

The investigators examine fear, money, and remorse as possible reasons for changes in the statements of witnesses Manoj, Rajat, and Sudeep. A fact concerning an external contact on Manoj's phone is discovered, but it does not automatically identify the person who made the threat. Rajat's additional payment is verified; its purpose remains disputed. The court refrains from identifying the owner of the offshore network or concluding that any individual is guilty on this limited evidence.

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Chapter 033 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 7

03 · The Map of Analogy

In the High Court, the government's proposal to expose privileged legal consultations on the basis of similarly worded messages and documents comes under examination. Justice Arya says linguistic resemblance, without confirmation of an independent source of origin, is no justification for viewing protected contents. The state insists on the legitimate need to gather evidence but accepts that confidential legal advice must be safeguarded. Similarity is an indicator, not a warrant for authorized access.

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Chapter 034 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 8

03 · The Map of Analogy

The court examines the distinct grounds for secrecy relating to sealed material, the limited confidentiality of the investigation diary, and attorney–client privilege. The state points to five links: two arise from the same provider, one from the coincidence of times, one from a payment record, and one from a category still under review. The court directs that reasons for secrecy be given separately and that the opposing party's opportunity to respond be protected. Home Minister Shiveshwar Prasad also values the court's trust above a quick victory.

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Chapter 035 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 9

03 · The Map of Analogy

An image from an unclear supplementary submission comes into public view, and news outlets begin presenting the many lines on the map as decisive proof. The court requires the distinctions among similarity of names, coincidence of times, and structural resemblance to be made clear. Raghav Sethia's side and government officials want firm public positions of their own, but Vidyanand and Aditya both allow space for opposing possibilities. Even independently verified similarities in payment records are not direct proof of ownership.

Chapter 036 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 10

03 · The Map of Analogy

Vidyanand resists pressure to call all the state's material false. He accepts the connections that have been established and challenges those without support. Within the Ministry of Home Affairs there is disagreement over a strategy of publicity versus a quiet, record-based reply. The defence divides its tasks according to the specializations of numerous senior advocates. Aditya clarifies that winning the court's confidence is not victory for the state's narrative; it means its limited claims can be tested.

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Chapter 037 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 11

03 · The Map of Analogy

The chain-of-custody register for the digital collector, the handovers, hash comparisons, and discrepancies of a few minutes undergo renewed examination. Aditya acknowledges that the initial separation procedure was more thoroughly documented only later. A clear chain of custody is important, but it cannot establish that allegations contained in the material are true. Malini reorganizes five visible points on her map into three groups of sources.

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Chapter 038 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 12

03 · The Map of Analogy

Home Minister Shiveshwar Prasad reads the revised map of analogies and has every broad claim screened. Since many different causes can produce similar web pages, the assertion of shared control across the sea is revised. The earlier version is ordered to be preserved too, so that the history of the changes will not be concealed. Senior law officers are to receive not only the conclusions but also the route by which they were revised.

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Chapter 039 — The Map of Analogy — Chapter 13

03 · The Map of Analogy

At the close of the section on analogy, the Attorney General and Solicitor General jointly review similarities, administrative times, and payment links. Different time sources on devices and the possibility of automatic maintenance weaken many comparisons. The defence challenges the state's revisions, but revision in itself does not establish bad faith. Aditya concludes that treating things with a similar appearance as necessarily arising from the same cause is an intellectual error.

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SECTION / खण्ड

04 · The Test of Words

Chapters 040–052 · Legal language, exact witness words, and open summaries

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Chapter 040 — The Test of Words — Chapter 1

04 · The Test of Words

The section on verbal evidence begins in the High Court with a scrutiny of the terminology used in the state's report. 'Administrator-level login,' 'administrative access,' and 'allegation of control' mean different things. The places where a summary has added meaning in place of the original words of Manoj, Rajat, and Sudeep are identified. The court orders the original statements, the investigator's interpretation, and independent corroboration to be kept separate.

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Chapter 041 — The Test of Words — Chapter 2

04 · The Test of Words

A dispute arises over the relationship among legal opinion, client communications, and business instructions within a mixed communication. The state wants to find independent commercial facts; Vidyanand warns that revealing the context of legal advice could breach privilege. The court distinguishes the classifications 'privileged' and 'non-privileged' from the truth or falsity of an allegation of crime. A lawful classification of access is not a criminal conclusion.

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Chapter 042 — The Test of Words — Chapter 3

04 · The Test of Words

Reference to a sealed source risks giving the judicial record unnecessary mystery and added apparent weight. The court orders that an essential open summary specify the kind of source, the time, the observed event, the state's limited interpretation, and what remains unproved. Malini learns to examine a source's independence beyond its 'hash,' 'time,' and 'number.' Several copies of the same material do not constitute several independent pieces of evidence.

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Chapter 043 — The Test of Words — Chapter 4

04 · The Test of Words

While preparing a supplementary submission in the pending Supreme Court matter, the draft open summary for the High Court is reviewed again. Vidyanand says that three entries draw conclusions going beyond the original records. Justice Arya invites the parties' comments and reserves the full order. The state suspends the use of one important entry because there is not yet an adequate basis for identifying its source and allowing it to be challenged.

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Chapter 044 — The Test of Words — Chapter 5

04 · The Test of Words

The difference between the state's earlier expression 'administrative control' and the actual access indicators is exposed. The High Court asks that the original record be matched against the summary; the defence asks whether repeated revisions are allowing the state to evade responsibility. Ananya Kashyap recognizes the appeal of a sensational headline such as 'Nine Senior Advocates versus the State.' The Home Minister agrees instead to a limited public statement that respects the pending proceedings.

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Chapter 045 — The Test of Words — Chapter 6

04 · The Test of Words

The bench tests each word against the original grounds for subpoenas, hash matches, and the chain of custody. Aditya clarifies the details of transport time, the sealed box, and the access register. A hash match shows that a digital copy has remained unchanged, not that its contents are true. The limits of meanings that have expanded beyond the sentence's original source are defined anew.

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Chapter 046 — The Test of Words — Chapter 7

04 · The Test of Words

At a joint ministry meeting, the different evidentiary burdens carried by words such as 'payment,' 'control,' 'benefit,' 'right,' and 'central figure' are discussed. A person's name appearing in a ledger or witness indication does not itself establish financial gain or operating authority. Aditya removes broad expressions or narrows their meaning. The state's revised vocabulary adopts more precise terms such as 'role,' 'hypothesis,' and 'not operative—reason uncertain.'

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Chapter 047 — The Test of Words — Chapter 8

04 · The Test of Words

A supplementary judicial note considers how to use the state's revised vocabulary and how far an open summary of sealed material can go. Giving only the date of a legal consultation and then writing 'the structure was changed with knowledge of the risk' is treated as an unsupported leap. Both the Attorney General and Vidyanand oppose turning words divorced from context into weapons. The court reserves further scrutiny for the potentially contradictory effect of such summaries and the right of rebuttal.

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Chapter 048 — The Test of Words — Chapter 9

04 · The Test of Words

The court again hears the witnesses' accounts of fear, suspected greed, and remorse. Justice Arya recognizes their feelings as real, but does not consider either the causes of those feelings or another person's crime automatically proved. The investigators accept the need to examine independently the source of fear and the particular event concerned. Careful language respects human experience, yet a separate evidentiary route is needed before that experience can become a judicial finding.

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Chapter 049 — The Test of Words — Chapter 10

04 · The Test of Words

A list of twelve entries claimed to be privileged comes under examination in the High Court. There is concern that even leaving some descriptions open might disclose legal strategy; Justice Arya orders minimal external descriptions and limited judicial inspection of selected material. The classification of the ninth, eleventh, and twelfth entries will require particular care. A claim of privilege alone proves neither suspicion of a crime nor innocence.

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Chapter 050 — Inside the Sealed Envelope

04 · The Test of Words

'Inside the Sealed Envelope' centres on the procedure for opening material under the court's control. The envelope's custody, time of deposit, signatures, and limited purpose for opening it are recorded. Justice Arya distinguishes possible meanings of 'control': ownership, technical access, authority to decide, or a matter still in question. Separate limits are placed on judicial inspection, material disclosed to the parties, independently corroborated facts, and the use of confidential inferences.

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Chapter 051 — The Test of Words — Chapter 12

04 · The Test of Words

After the sealed inspection, Vidyanand Mishra emphasizes the limits on the material's judicial use. Journalists want to turn the confidential envelope into a decisive dramatic event, but the real question is how much of the underlying basis should be disclosed to the opposing party. Mrinal Dhar proposes separate categories of reasons for confidentiality. The court clarifies that an adverse order sought on the basis of any sealed passage requires special scrutiny.

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Chapter 052 — The Test of Words — Chapter 13

04 · The Test of Words

At the final hearing of the section on words, senior advocate Arunesh Sen questions the origin of the state's revised open summary and the changes in its language. The bench examines translation, independence of sources, and the disclosed history of earlier versions. Admitting an error does not destroy the original source, but concealing it erodes trust. The defence, likewise, cannot reject every original record merely because of a mistake in wording. The chapter opens the next question of postulation: how to explain a missing link between established facts.

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SECTION / खण्ड

05 · The Turn of Postulation

Chapters 053–065 · Time discrepancies, service keys, and necessary explanations

Chapter 053 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 1

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The section on postulation begins with a contradiction in digital times: how was a service request accepted after access through the web browser had been suspended? Malini first raises the possibility of human intervention, then discovers that an independent service-key route could make the two facts consistent. Aditya teaches that an inference cannot be called 'necessary' while an alternative arrangement remains possible. The court defines the limits of the questions that can be tested.

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Chapter 054 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 2

05 · The Turn of Postulation

At the ministry, a five-question examination plan is prepared around time differences, service keys, payment references, and confidential sources. It is proposed that the provider be asked for records of authorization, key creation, changes, and the route used. Aditya keeps established facts, the additional condition considered necessary, rival arrangements, and unproved identities separate. The plan also provides for the minimum open material needed to let the defence respond effectively.

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Chapter 055 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 3

05 · The Turn of Postulation

In the Attorney General's legal chambers, five proposals based on postulation undergo review. The possibilities of automated, queued, or time-shifted processes narrow some far-reaching inferences. Vidyanand writes his professional response while worrying about Shailaja's treatment and household expenses. The state asks the court to distinguish a necessary explanation from an established fact. Postulation is a direction for inquiry, not automatically an accusation or a conviction.

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Chapter 056 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 4

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The Supreme Court examines three disputed connections: an unusual payment, an approval indicator, and Sudeep's presence. The absence of a routine authorization indicator does not settle the cause of an exceptional payment, since a lawful later adjustment remains possible. The initials 'R.S.' are not treated as proof of Raghav Sethia's identity. The court requests separate accounts of the facts, the proposed meaning, and independent evidence.

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Chapter 057 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 5

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The High Court conducts a limited examination of the three privilege-disputed entries numbered 9, 11, and 12. The state asks for some external times and payment references, but Justice Arya does not permit protected legal advice to be used to verify open records. A pre-existing commercial fact does not become confidential merely because it was sent to a lawyer; however, the lawyer's selection and ordering of facts may expose legal strategy. Verification from independent sources is given priority.

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Chapter 058 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 6

05 · The Turn of Postulation

Old confidential indications in the investigation diary are reviewed again. Far-reaching assumptions of human agency based on deleted files, an active service key, and a witness's remorse are set apart. Where an automated process is available, immediate intervention by a particular person cannot be deemed necessary. Aditya also preserves abandoned or unsuccessful investigative lines, so that a later examination can scrutinize the history of the inquiry.

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Chapter 059 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 7

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The state and defence debate the meaning of postulation: the minimum additional condition without which established facts could not coexist. The defence objects to presenting a proposal originating from a confidential source as though it were an independently verified fact. The court gives interim directions on genuinely testing alternative causes and on the parties' right to reply. For an initial inference to become necessary, a contrary possibility must be ruled out, not merely set aside.

Chapter 060 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 8

05 · The Turn of Postulation

Before a large team of advocates, there is direct debate over the activation of a service key and the time difference in custody of a physical digital collector. The state accepts that service activity following a browser's inactivity need not require human control; certain operational arrangements would suffice. A four-minute gap in the custody register does not automatically amount to tampering. As broad propositions are narrowed, the true extent of the dispute becomes smaller.

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Chapter 061 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 9

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The service provider's response confirms that a service key remained active for part of the period, but the user and any immediate human presence are unknown. Justice Arya considers it proper to name the unresolved gap and acknowledge the limits of an incomplete source. The court's directions make no finding about anyone's ownership, role, or criminal guilt. From postulation, the narrative turns toward defining missing records.

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Chapter 062 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 10

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The procedural records are examined for relationships among scheduling, authentication routes, and the times of payments. Aditya accepts that the occurrence of one event immediately after another does not prove causation. A lawful technical route may be accepted as a minimum requirement, but separate evidence is necessary to identify the user or purpose. Keeping an independent column for contrary facts prevents an inference from expanding without limit.

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Chapter 063 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 11

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The Attorney General and Solicitor General read the state's updated factual brief. Before explaining a missing record, it becomes necessary to establish whether it would normally have been created, how it would be preserved, whether it was legally available, and the range of the search. A one-minute gap in custody remains recorded; the state treats it neither as proof of tampering nor as insignificant. Vidyanand confines his objection to specific questions of sources, without alleging bad faith by the investigator.

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Chapter 064 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 12

05 · The Turn of Postulation

The court hears arguments applying different standards to suspicion, accusation, established fact, and a proposal based on postulation. The discovery of an unusual payment or procedural departure is not permitted to grow into a story about 'secret inducement.' Witnesses' fear, financial shame, and remorse are heard, but these states of mind do not prove another person's crime. The state confines its explanation to the minimum statement supported by sources.

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Chapter 065 — The Turn of Postulation — Chapter 13

05 · The Turn of Postulation

A difficult dispute arises over the relationship between a privileged legal selection list and independent external financial records. The possibility that an external service server, payment gateway, and time data all derive from a common source reduces the force of supposed combined corroboration. The court acknowledges the danger of revealing strategy through the order in which a lawyer selected material. Aditya directs the state toward completing independent external verification rather than breaching the protected boundary.

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SECTION / खण्ड

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

Chapters 066–078 · Missing records, search limits, and protected non-disclosure

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Chapter 066 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 1

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

At the beginning of the section on non-availability, questions arise about messages that were deleted or not found, old keys, and the existence of records. Aditya clarifies that failure to find a file in a local forensic image is not proof that it exists nowhere in the world. The court requires an adequate examination of the expected record, the scope of the search, the retention period, and alternative locations. Before any adverse inference from non-availability, the defence must receive an adequately open account of the search.

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Chapter 067 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 2

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

Vidyanand distinguishes several causes of non-availability: a record never created, time having passed, an incomplete search, legal protection, technical inaccessibility, or absence after a sufficient search. A supplementary submission in the Supreme Court puts this classification to the test. The presence of external metadata raises a different question from the absence of the original message. The court seeks a balance between source protection and effective rebuttal, without making a finding of guilt.

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Chapter 068 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 3

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

The Supreme Court directs that an absent record be assessed according to the nature of its original system. Some references to correspondence exist, but the messages themselves cannot be found; the absence of an expected event log has significance only to the extent that such an event was likely to have been recorded. A hash-verified image of a physical device does not establish the completeness of external or remote systems. Ananya Kashyap turns the court's cautious directions into an accurate headline instead of a sensation.

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Chapter 069 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 4

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

Because the provider's administrative records have a ninety-day retention period, the absence of older entries becomes meaningful but limited. The collector's description of a 'complete image' is revised to 'a complete bit-level image of the seized physical collector.' A difference in one custody time remains separate from later hash matching. The court distinguishes three levels: an incident not proved, a gap documented, and the integrity of an object verified.

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Chapter 070 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 5

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

The Ministry of Home Affairs develops a strategy of targeted preservation orders for unavailable material. Rather than an indefinite, sweeping search, decisions are made about identified sources, defined periods, and legally valid subpoenas. Shiveshwar Prasad directs that the state's overbroad language be reduced but favours preserving genuine indications of non-availability. Malini understands legally necessary narrowing not as retreat but as correcting the scope of evidence.

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Chapter 071 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 6

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

Three sources suggesting deletion are examined: the time is clear in one but the user unknown; in the second, authority is known but the time period broad; in the third, automatic deletion is possible. Aditya confines the significance of a hash value to the integrity of the specified image. In court, the state narrows unsupported broad assertions and the defence resists unproved accusations. The technical link between 'it was deleted' and 'a particular person deleted it' is still missing.

Chapter 072 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 7

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

The Supreme Court creates separate categories for possibilities under examination, absence after an adequate search, absence because the retention period has expired, and material withheld on grounds of privilege. The number of sources is not treated as a substitute for their independence or evidentiary weight. The state accepts that the need to investigate a particular allegation is different from the scope of protected communications. The next stage is prepared to trace every route from source to conclusion.

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Chapter 073 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 8

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

The High Court separates independently available records from the contents of protected legal communications. Justice Arya says opening confidential communications should not be the first resort when an independent source exists. The state acknowledges finding an external reference to a message on a magnetic storage device, but its actual content is protected elsewhere. The court records distinct limits for the technical questions of hashes and custody and the legal question of privilege.

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Chapter 074 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 9

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

The court again clarifies the difference between material genuinely not found after a search and material that exists but is not produced because it is protected. It distinguishes incidents recorded in the case diary by name, time, and web address from conclusions such as 'a particular person exercises control.' The state must make an appropriate basis available for any adverse use dependent on a confidential source. A proposal for a combined map of six evidentiary paths begins the next phase of integrated reasoning.

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Chapter 075 — Gangesha Upadhyaya's Aphorism

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

In 'Gangesha Upadhyaya's Aphorism,' Aditya brings conclusions derived from perception, inference, analogy, verbal testimony, postulation, and non-availability together on one map of evidence. For each proposition, it becomes necessary to record the person, time, relationship, source, alternative cause, and maximum permissible use. Devvrat Sinha and Vidyanand Mishra agree that precise rebuttal becomes possible against a limited proposition. The map is not final truth; it is a living method open to revision as records and judicial decisions change.

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Chapter 076 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 11

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

In testing the integrated map, the relationships among records derived from a single original source are distinguished from genuine confirmation through independent sources. Vidyanand questions a missing-link argument built on postulation; Devvrat accepts that multiplicity is not the same as independence. Clear accounts are requested of the investigation team's subpoenas, forensic imaging, hash lists, and custody register. A history of corrections is not itself decisive evidence of untrustworthiness.

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Chapter 077 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 12

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

In the High Court, the combined evidentiary weight is examined according to the classification of material withheld and material unavailable after a search. Several derivatives of the same image are not treated as independent evidence. The court refuses to call non-production of material beyond a subpoena's demand disobedience. Vidyanand also questions the public impact of the government's earlier overbroad claims, while Aditya insists on the integrity of the record.

Chapter 078 — The Edge of Non-Availability — Chapter 13

06 · The Edge of Non-Availability

At the end of the section on non-availability, the different evidentiary values of access logs, security-gate times, and lists of authorized users become apparent. The possibility of shared or delegated access prevents definite identification of the actor. Although an exported table is available, its limitation is recorded because the original source cannot be re-examined. Inferring a person's criminal role from gaps in a record without sufficient external support is deemed an unsound principle.

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SECTION / खण्ड

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

Chapters 079–091 · Testing alternatives and the independence of sources

Chapter 079 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 1

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

In the section on reasoning, every claim on the integrated evidence map is tested against possible contrary causes. Aditya prepares separate registers for propositions, sources, conclusions, and alternatives not yet disproved. Vidyanand repeatedly objects to treating multiple copies of the same original source as independent corroboration. The court orders connections still under examination to be described as such, so that one unresolved proposition does not become spurious proof of another.

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Chapter 080 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 2

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The court tests the logical links among suspicion, accusation, and evidence through witness-related examples. Sudeep's presence in a building coincides with the times of some meetings, but that does not automatically establish his participation in an illegal decision. The defence offers an alternative explanation, and the state clarifies how it would test it. The limits on using disputed privileged communications and independent external material arise once again.

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Chapter 081 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 3

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The investigators' proposed link among a deleted email, its deletion time, and confidential communications is examined. The state concedes that although deletion was recorded, the person responsible, the purpose, and the connection with protected advice have not been proved. Independent external conduct can be judicially examined, but cannot by itself establish an exception to privilege. Asserting a right is not itself an indication of criminal wrongdoing.

Chapter 082 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 4

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The court distinguishes three kinds of relationship: a search prompted by a sealed source, physical material obtained independently, and statements in the investigation diary. Questions arise about recording the history of an inquiry, including unsuccessful alternatives and avenues not pursued. Justice Arya indicates that a deficiency disclosed promptly may help establish judicial trust. Limits are also necessary on how the defence may challenge indirect use of confidential material.

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Chapter 083 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 5

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The defence says there must be a bar on using undisclosed material adversely; the state proposes arrangements that would make an effective answer possible. Before the court, protecting confidentiality and the right to a fair hearing do not simply clash; both require lawful limits. Junior advocates for the defence want to make sweeping allegations about the state's motives, but Vidyanand chooses narrow, record-based rebuttal. Constructing accusations from what has 'not been seen' is judged risky for both sides.

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Chapter 084 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 6

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The test of reasoning is applied to deleted mail, shared digital sources, and the presence of several senior defence advocates. Aditya acknowledges similarities in open records but refuses conclusions about person-specific control. The court examines whether an alternative possibility weakens an actual evidentiary link or is merely speculation. Its policy is that publicity and the number of parties or lawyers do not increase the weight of evidence.

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Chapter 085 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 7

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

In preparation for the eighth stage of reasoning, the legal limits on demands for subpoenas covering defined periods, administrative access records, and service-key changes are examined. The defence raises the alternative of shared use, while the state distinguishes a device's hash integrity from the truth of its contents. The possibility that payment-gateway indicators arose from a single underlying customer flow weakens the claim of independent corroboration. A seven-minute gap in the custody register remains openly recorded.

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Chapter 086 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 8

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

At the ministry, the state prepares a brief on how well its arguments withstand challenge. Malini limits the claim of structural connection to what independent access records actually support. Officers consider which portions of the government's claim would have to be reduced if the defence's alternative explanation were confirmed. The revised list is sent to the Attorney General and Solicitor General. Reasoning is used not to shield a claim from examination, but to expose how it might fail.

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Chapter 087 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 9

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The defence raises the possibility of shared authorized use; the state requests examination of the relevant authorization register, user list, and custodian's records. A supplementary submission clarifies that proposing an alternative explanation does not itself amount to independent proof. Several alternatives are possible, but they have differing degrees of external support. Only established documentary links can justify a conclusion directed against a particular person.

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Chapter 088 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 10

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The digital access register supports a conclusion about two people, while only an audio record close in time is available for a third. Independent identification of the speaker in the audio has not been completed. The court reiterates that the weight of evidence depends on authenticity of source, admissibility, independence, context, and the opportunity to rebut it. The distinction between established presence and unproved personal wrongdoing becomes the next focus of reasoning.

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Chapter 089 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 11

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

The central dispute becomes whether external evidence was sought after viewing the protected legal list or an independent route to discovery already existed. Malini produces an old saved copy of a public web indicator dated before the protected list. Vidyanand's side also submits evidence of an older public registration. The court directs an examination of whether the external material actually originated independently or was identified under the influence of confidential clues.

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Chapter 090 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 12

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

In the Supreme Court, a difficult question arises about sharing the analytical method used for an unidentified or protected technical source. The state proposes to preserve identities while supplying a lawful account of public domain-name history, certificate dates, service infrastructure, and the method of discovery. The defence insists that a comparison with unseen material must not support an adverse order. The court reserves orders on some questions and asks for detailed source-neutral descriptions on others.

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Chapter 091 — The Thunderbolt of Reasoning — Chapter 13

07 · The Thunderbolt of Reasoning

In the final chapter on reasoning, decisions address the route by which sealed passages were discovered and the limited use of hypotheses entered in the investigation diary. The chronology of independently obtained external sources may be used, but the identity of the actor and the truth of the contents require separate tests. The defence asks that four adverse uses be prohibited. The court does not give the diary the status of evidence, limiting it to an account of the investigation's direction and the origin of its sources.

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SECTION / खण्ड

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

Chapters 092–100 · Consolidated evidence paths and a procedural decision

Chapter 092 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 1

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

At the beginning of the section on judgment, the court again asks for the basis of every connection on the overall evidence map. Separate sources are presented for payments, times, witness statements, and independent external records. The bench says that the number of senior advocates, a ministry's prestige, a news headline, or an officer's confidence does not add judicial weight. The final examination turns on the independence of sources and a sufficient opportunity to rebut them.

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Chapter 093 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 2

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

The court pauses over the word 'complete' in describing a forensic image. Aditya explains that a complete image of one medium seized at a specified time is not evidence of every possible communication everywhere. Devices, accounts, payment requests, administrative timestamps, and actual human beings are examined in separate statements. Justice Arya asks the state to specify the exact evidentiary route available for any claim that an individual exercised control.

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Chapter 094 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 3

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

In the consolidated list for judgment, the time and limits of the original digital image and its dependence on external sources are defined separately. Verification of material available on the seized storage device does not establish the completeness of other service computers or unknown external devices. The court distinguishes structural signs of network connections from individual access and ownership. In drafting its account, the narrow meaning of 'acquired image' is carefully preserved.

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Chapter 095 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 4

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

The state's final submission offers some limited support for a multi-source digital and financial structure, but the basis for finding that particular individuals operated it is not the same in every case. Vidyanand urges that no adverse conclusion be drawn without independent evidence open to challenge. The history of revisions to earlier government claims is also placed before the court. Unproved agency, the purpose of unavailable material, and the independence of certain sources remain open questions.

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Chapter 096 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 5

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

The state seeks a broad finding that common service infrastructure existed; the defence raises alternatives including shared account access, automated sessions, and remote operation. The bench accepts that real transactions or presence established by independent records cannot simply be denied because a criminal purpose remains unproved. Yet the existence of a structural network and the fact that someone knowingly operated it must remain subject to separate tests.

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Chapter 097 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 6

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

There is a hearing on the independence of external material obtained through investigative clues that came close to protected legal communications. The state proposes a process in which a separate team, unaware of the protected list, would reproduce findings using public contracts and older external records. The court also reviews the classification of mixed commercial instructions and legal advice. Any adverse fact used in the final decision must have an independent source or a sufficiently disclosed route of discovery.

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Chapter 098 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 7

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

A searching examination asks whether material described as independently reproduced was actually found through independent sources or by following sealed clues. The provenance of one intermediate export remains incomplete, so its effect is limited. The court refuses to make supplementary or supporting material decisive in its judgment. Even where an open external record has verified independence, its value does not automatically increase through a resemblance to confidential material.

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Chapter 099 — The Dawn of Judgment — Chapter 8

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

A hearing addresses coordination between the High Court's earlier directions and the pending special leave proceedings in the Supreme Court. The court orders that the source, route of discovery, disclosure, opportunity to respond, and maximum evidentiary value of every adverse proposition be set out in writing. Person-specific findings resting on unknown links to sealed or privilege-adjacent material are restrained. The parties are directed to submit a concise evidence-path table for the final decision.

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Chapter 100 — The Light of Judgment over the Ganges

08 · The Dawn of Judgment

In the last chapter, the symbolic light over the Ganges frames the judicial conflict's outcome in a decision centred on procedure. Independent external records lend limited support to the existence of certain payment routes, service structures, and administrative interfaces, but do not establish every individual's ownership, intention, or crime. The court protects an effective opportunity of rebuttal while directing that the limits of confidentiality, privilege, non-availability, witness testimony, and digital images be made explicit. The order is neither a final conviction nor a declaration of innocence: it defines the boundaries of a fair judicial examination.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Narrative

03 · Navya Nyaya and the Offshore Gambling Network

Overall Narrative

At the outset, the investigation team looks for alleged connections within an offshore gambling network; the court's questions, however, increasingly concern the procedure of investigation, the integrity of digital records, and the limits of legal confidentiality. Aditya and Malini do not regard a reduction in the number of asserted facts as defeat: they understand it as a process of improving the accuracy of evidence.

Across all eight sections, the kinds of evidence change, but the central ethical test remains the same: what was actually observed, why a connection is inferred, which alternative possibilities exist, and what assertions may properly be used in court against an individual's rights. The language of both the state

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Overall Narrative

and the defence is subjected to this test.

At its close, the novel does not issue a final declaration of criminal guilt. It establishes the lawful conditions of judicial scrutiny. The image of light over the Ganges is joined to the discipline of Navya Nyaya, in which the courage to call an unproved assertion unproved is an essential part of justice.

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WORK / कृति

04 · The Translator

100 Chapters · Complete English Translation

SECTION / खण्ड

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

04 · The Translator

Chapter 1 — The Translator from Mithila

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank Jha, a young man from Mithila educated in Navya Nyaya, comes to Delhi in search of a livelihood amid family debts, the lack of a secure home, and anxiety over his sister's education. His determination to learn Chinese takes him to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the Red Fort, and the Tao temple in Pitampura. His first conversation with a Chinese tourist and the teachings of the practitioner Juliana help him understand that translation is not merely an exchange of words; it is a task involving trust and ethical responsibility. Gangesha's method of reasoning and the sounds of a new language begin to connect with one another.

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Chapter 2 — Lessons from Three Books

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Shashank learns about the relationship between sound, sentence, and usage through three books. The changing tones of Chinese correspond, in his understanding, to the Navya Nyaya concept of delimitation. His teacher forbids him to add anything false while trying to preserve a meaning established by its context. At the Red Fort, his decision to repeat a tourist’s unclear question rather than guess at its meaning becomes his first practical success. A Chinese student gives him Juliana’s address. The chapter’s central conclusion is that a translator’s error arises not only in words but also through the misuse of purpose and context.

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Chapter 3 — From Mithila to Delhi — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Facing financial hardship, Shashank goes to a small office to translate a Chinese-language conversation about payments. References to separate accounts, payment gateways, hawala, and layered flows of money make him suspicious. He does not declare a crime without evidence, but asks for the limits of his assignment in writing. There he meets Mrinal Karna, another young man from Mithila, who warns him to be careful about accounts and signatures. Shashank leaves the assignment, and a friendship begins. Distinguishing suspicion, accusation, and proof becomes a practical principle of his life.

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Chapter 4 — From Mithila to Delhi — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank accepts a lucrative three-day interpreting assignment in Macau. The job description specifies limited linguistic assistance, but out of curiosity he opens an additional report page available in a demonstration system. This is his first unmistakable breach of the limits of his work. In speaking with Mrinal afterward, he does not describe the incident fully. He uses his fee to help his family and buys himself a new pen; at the same time, his desire for prestige and exceptional access grows alongside his desire for money. Through this small choice, the chapter shows the beginning of an ethical departure.

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Chapter 5 — From Mithila to Delhi — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

After returning from Macau, Shashank reads Chinese emails, service agreements, and payment annexures at advocate Raghav Bhasin’s office. When differences in meaning emerge between the original Chinese and an English draft, Raghav insists on clarity and the preservation of the original intention. Shashank understands that an inappropriate choice of words can change the extent of legal responsibility. The assignment does not immediately establish any criminal act, but the distinction between confidentiality and possible participation makes him uneasy. He records his fear and curiosity in private notes.

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Chapter 6 — From Mithila to Delhi — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Reading letters from an overseas client concerning a tax inquiry, Shashank avoids assigning definite meanings to ambiguous references such as “above,” “head office,” and “contact.” He learns that the local investigation has been suspended, but the reasons for the written order are unclear. Elsewhere, officer Aditya Mishra records the original objection and the suspension order separately. Although Shashank and Aditya do not know one another, both follow the same discipline: what remains unproved must be described as unproved. Mrinal counsels Shashank against both blind distrust and blind faith.

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Chapter 7 — From Mithila to Delhi — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A digital news report names Shashank as a possible intermediary in the halting of a foreign company’s tax investigation. Shashank and Mrinal distinguish the writer’s assertions, anonymous sources, and verified facts. In Aditya’s office, the original papers are examined, but acquaintance or translation work alone does not prove interference. Public humiliation enrages Shashank; nevertheless, he tries not to retaliate with unsupported allegations. The question remains how much truth about his own past he will admit in his defence.

Chapter 8 — The Chinese Tourist at the Red Fort

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The chapter opens with a future courtroom cross-examination and returns to an earlier incident at the Red Fort. When the bag of a Chinese tourist, Lin Yue, was thought to have disappeared, someone was suspected. The bag was later found in a vehicle, and no theft was established. For the immediate convenience of calming the situation, Shashank failed to preserve an important “not” in the tourist’s original statement. In court he admits this linguistic omission. A small error becomes the beginning of his future ethical crisis: what was not seen must never be presented as though it had been seen.

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Chapter 9 — From Mithila to Delhi — 9

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank receives a formal summons and goes to give a statement in Aditya Mishra’s office. Questions arise about the multiple possible meanings of Chinese expressions such as “payment route,” the direction of payments, and the roles of several institutions. His phone and laptop are lawfully seized for digital examination. He has two ambiguous sentences in his statement corrected, since a possibility and definite knowledge are different things. A summons or seizure does not, by itself, establish guilt; yet Shashank also feels a stir of pride on seeing the importance of his linguistic talent to the investigation.

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Chapter 10 — From Mithila to Delhi — 10

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Summoned again to Aditya’s office, Shashank clarifies the distinctions among a chain of contracts, payment recipients, and actual beneficial ownership. Seeing similar terminology or resembling signatures across several institutions, he begins to infer a larger system of control. Aditya, however, demands independent banking and ownership evidence. Shashank recognizes his eagerness to offer conclusions that go beyond what is justified. Mrinal says that explaining the limited meaning of a fact is an achievement, but turning that achievement into a personal victory is dangerous.

Chapter 11 — From Mithila to Delhi — 11

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya engages Shashank in a limited linguistic comparison of bank summaries, payment gateways, and account records. It is repeatedly made clear that a single flow of money cannot, by itself, establish ownership or criminal purpose. Shashank remains mindful of his first error at the Red Fort. Messages from unknown people and the attraction of professional recognition stir fresh doubts in him, while Mrinal's questions remind him of the difference between facts and stories. Their friendship becomes not a defence of his excuses but a test of his judgment.

Chapter 12 — From Mithila to Delhi — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank receives a proposal for a second formal language assignment in Macau. The large fee and the possibility of privileged access attract him. During the journey and a limited demonstration, he sees certain commercial indicators that may be connected with older records from Delhi, but the connection is unproved. He cannot speak completely openly with Mrinal, and the limits of evidence remain unchanged before Aditya. The wish to be regarded as a special person is becoming even more powerful than his greed for money. At the end, he considers visiting Juliana again.

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Chapter 13 — The Tao Temple in Pitampura

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At the Tao temple in Pitampura, Juliana teaches Shashank to listen beyond pronunciation—to his own silence, fear, and choices about truth. Meanwhile, interpreting a confidential legal meeting at Raghav’s office, Shashank maintains a distinction between business documents and legal advice. An ambiguous chat, an episode involving a change of name, and incomplete information are not treated as sufficient grounds for declaring a crime. Later, Shashank admits that he had failed to disclose several important experiences fully and at the right time. The temple offers him no easy absolution, but a discipline of self-admission.

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Chapter 14 — The Discipline of Language — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A lesson on the reliability of verbal testimony brings Shashank back to questions about his earlier silence. Amid a comment reducing the priority of a tax investigation, uncertain claims of instructions from “above,” and an anonymous telephone call asking for softer language, he does not proclaim an unproved conspiracy. He later tells Aditya, of his own accord, about an experience he did not disclose in time and resolves to provide a written statement. Speaking the truth late and distorting the truth are different things; even so, their ethical proximity troubles Shashank. The discipline of language becomes an exercise in self-examination.

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Chapter 15 — The Discipline of Language — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Once again, a news report links Shashank’s name to confidential material and influence over an investigation. He admits in a written explanation that he opened a page beyond his authorised limits in Macau, but states that he knows of no secret arrangement to stop the tax inquiry and no decisive role of his own in doing so. Aditya records his statement in accordance with the available evidence. Mrinal and Juliana discourage him from distorting language in retaliation for his humiliation. Shashank’s challenge is to conceal none of his actual wrongdoing while refusing to accept accusations that remain unproved.

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Chapter 16 — The Discipline of Language — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank undergoes a lengthy cross-examination in court. His answers are tested concerning his viewing of a server page outside his authorised remit, the interpretations he added as a translator, and the intentions behind the original statements. He acknowledges that understanding a language does not automatically establish a speaker's actual purpose or the truth of a record. Many questions confront him with his earlier wording. By the end of the cross-examination, Shashank has begun to question even the carefully arranged story he tells about himself. The discipline of linguistic skill ultimately becomes a lesson in reducing pride.

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Chapter 17 — The Discipline of Language — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Under a supplementary summons, Shashank examines seized audio messages and the meaning of Chinese texts. The possible senses of words such as “route,” “channel,” and “payment gateway” are distinguished. Even when his own previous expressions or the names of acquaintances appear in the investigation, he avoids partisan interpretations. Aditya requires the source of each assertion and the limits of authorised access to be made clear. Through Juliana’s teaching, Shashank learns the just distinction among saying “no,” saying “not proved,” and saying “I do not know.”

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Chapter 18 — The Discipline of Language — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the separate meanings of representative, signatory, recipient of payment, and actual beneficial owner are taught. In Aditya’s investigation, an important difference concerning ownership appears between the original Chinese contract and its English translation. Shashank employs his close linguistic attention but resists the temptation to announce who truly owns the business. A question from a Chinese acquaintance also cautions him against displaying confidential knowledge. Accurate translation means showing the relationships present in the language without determining ownership where evidence is lacking.

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Chapter 19 — The Discipline of Language — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya shows records that separately mention payment gateways, third-party accounts, hawala, and digital assets. Shashank tries to connect various indications, but the investigator demands an independent basis for every inference. Mrinal’s direct objections and his conversations with Juliana teach him that friendship is not blind support: it requires the courage to ask questions. Shashank writes in his notes that a friend’s warning must not be mistaken for hostility. Language still brings him near money and prestige, but the ethical risk of that proximity remains.

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Chapter 20 — Juliana’s Lesson

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank receives an offer of regular monthly language consultancy from a group in Macau, including permission to examine selected server pages within defined limits. The large fee and exceptional access tempt him. Before Juliana, he makes an explicit admission of his earlier curiosity beyond authorised limits and chooses to give Aditya a supplementary statement. Mrinal advises him to examine the written scope of the offer and any conflict of interest. The chapter does not claim that greed has disappeared; Juliana’s lesson is to recognise it by its proper name first.

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Chapter 21 — The Discipline of Language — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

During a confidential legal meeting at Raghav’s office, Shashank tries to keep privileged advice, business facts, and his own direct involvement separate while translating a Chinese statement. He asks Juliana when remaining silent amounts to proper confidentiality and when it becomes concealment of a fact. Mrinal advises him to keep a restricted personal record of dates, places, roles, and subjects translated, without disclosing confidential material. An indication involving an old payment name appears, but neither a crime nor a personal connection is established. The difficulty of remaining silent in the right way lies at the centre of the chapter.

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Chapter 22 — The Discipline of Language — 9

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya’s file contains an order reducing the priority of an inquiry compared with the original need for verification. Questions arise about instructions from “above” and the softened language of a summary, but the documentary evidence is incomplete. Shashank distinguishes the source of the wording, the sequence of revisions, and second-hand reports. Juliana marks the distance between a feeling of betrayal and proof of a crime. The case shows that the language of an institutional decision may have been altered, yet this alone cannot identify a particular person or conspiracy.

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Chapter 23 — The Discipline of Language — 10

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A news outlet describes Shashank as the chief linguistic link to a Chinese network in sealed records. The article connects his Macau journey, limited server access, and an old payment name, approaching the claim that he played a part in moving money. Aditya refuses to assume a leak without independent verification. Shashank and Mrinal separate the components of the accusation, what Shashank has actually admitted, and what remains unknown. Despite public humiliation, he tries to resist the temptation to clear his name by contaminating the facts.

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Chapter 24 — The Discipline of Language — 11

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In court, Shashank is questioned in detail about translated expressions, additions made from context, and ambiguous meanings. He explicitly admits that in some places his interpretation went beyond the original statement. The court examines limits on the use of sealed material, but no broad criminal purpose is established at this hearing. Shashank learns that self-admission does not mean accepting every allegation against himself; it means answering by identifying his actual additions and uncertainties. His ambition, however, remains alive.

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Chapter 25 — The Discipline of Language — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A supplementary summons requires Shashank to verify selected Chinese portions of seized digital material. He records possible meanings separately from definite intentions. The satisfaction of being useful to the investigation awakens again within him, but he states explicitly that wherever he is personally connected to the case, his interpretation should not be regarded as final without independent verification. For the first time, he imposes a procedural limit on his own claim to be indispensable.

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Chapter 26 — The Discipline of Language — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, a lesson on the difference between a representative and an owner again teaches Shashank linguistic humility. Examining contracts, the names of foreign organisations, and payment records with Aditya, he opposes identifying a person or establishing actual ownership merely because names are similar. In his conversation with a tourist at the Red Fort, too, he makes the boundaries of meaning explicit. Yet a new professional assignment in Noida attracts him. The chapter bridges the responsible use of pride in linguistic ability and a new trial posed by economic opportunity.

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Chapter 27 — Contracts and Shadows — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In Noida, Shashank becomes the language and administrative coordinator for a small repair contract. Mrinal reads the agreement beforehand and defines the scope of the work. Separate papers are examined concerning an air-conditioning leak, the supply of materials, and payment through a third-party account. A call from an unknown person causes discomfort, but whether it is intended as a threat is not certain. The actual problem proves to be a blocked drain. The legitimate supplier’s role is clarified in writing. Shashank learns that even a small contract requires a documentary record when ambiguous words and anonymous pressure arise.

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Chapter 28 — The First Contract in Noida

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The first repair contract in Noida is completed after inspection and scrutiny of the documents. Mrinal makes separate records for the payment arrangements, material supplies, and language services. Meanwhile, indications arrive of a proposal from Macau involving higher fees, travel, and limited access to a system. Having learned from earlier experience, Shashank does not offer unconditional acceptance at once, but the prospect of a new opportunity attracts him. The chapter reveals the difference between the concrete reality of a small job successfully completed and the imagined prestige of exceptional access abroad.

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Chapter 29 — Contracts and Shadows — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In a draft confidentiality agreement from Macau, Shashank sees that certain clauses may expose him to the risks of broader coordination or representation. Raghav Bhasin has the ambiguous legal terms revised. Mrinal emphasises authorised communication in writing instead of private oral instructions. At the same time, similarities between anonymous phone calls and comments about lowering the priority of an investigation disturb Shashank. Aditya does not declare a conspiracy merely on the strength of such similarities. Shashank becomes more frightened, but secures written limits to the contract.

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Chapter 30 — Contracts and Shadows — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An original note from a lower commissioner's office states that verification remains incomplete, while the summary above it softens the expression of suspicion. Aditya, Shashank, and the relevant staff compare the versions. Shashank is hurt to discover that his carefully qualified words have been cut, but it remains unproved on whose instructions the revision was made. He asks that the full original sentence be restored to the office record. The tension grows between the feeling of institutional betrayal and what the documents actually establish. The next morning, his name appears in the news.

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Chapter 31 — Contracts and Shadows — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A news report constructs a powerful story against Shashank by bringing together his role in Noida, the offer from Macau, and purported information from sealed material. With help from Mrinal and Raghav, Shashank separates facts from allegations and claims whose sources cannot be determined, then issues a limited public clarification. Juliana reminds him that humiliation is not equivalent to fact. He also notices his old habit of exaggerating his own role. In responding to his damaged reputation, making unproved accusations against others becomes a subject of his own self-criticism.

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Chapter 32 — Contracts and Shadows — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In court, Shashank is cross-examined about the Noida repair assignment, the purported source of confidential material, and his translations of differing Chinese expressions. He admits that he rendered certain distinct original terms by the same expression in an Indian language, which may have reduced their differences in meaning. Yet the same translation does not automatically establish the same source or the same crime. The court leaves open the questions of the material’s authenticity and provenance. Shashank senses that being summoned or placed at the centre of an investigation is not a certificate of personal importance.

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Chapter 33 — Contracts and Shadows — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A supplementary summons prompts examination of Shashank’s statement, earlier payment messages, an equipment inventory, and his role in language services. An old translation table and the names of people involved raise the possibility that a claim of wider operations may be constructed from them. He keeps his answers brief, yet his inner desire to become an indispensable translator reawakens. Mrinal makes it clear that being useful and being irreplaceable are two different things. The inquiry remains centred on documentary records, authorised access, and the limits of responsibility.

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Chapter 34 — Contracts and Shadows — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Examining three bilingual contracts, a payment schedule, and a list of vendors, Shashank distinguishes the contracting party, representative, service recipient, payment recipient, and beneficial owner. Some additions made for convenience are found in his earlier summary; their actual effect requires separate examination. Mrinal and Aditya prevent him from drawing hasty inferences. Another anonymous phone call creates pressure. The chapter demonstrates that identical names or similar language may suggest a possible connection but do not prove identity or involvement in a crime.

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Chapter 35 — The Bully’s Phone Call

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A call from an unknown person hints that Shashank should distance himself from the Noida papers, the tax investigation, and his own role in them. In Mrinal’s presence, he preserves the caller’s exact words; Aditya records the time, voice, and available details. The possibility of intimidation arises, but the caller’s identity and connection to earlier events remain unproved. Rather than changing his language or presenting incomplete facts out of fear, Shashank adopts documentary caution. At the same moment, another attractive invitation arrives from Macau, intensifying the clash between outside pressure and the greed within him.

Chapter 36 — Contracts and Shadows — 10

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The Noida contract is drawing to a close as Shashank considers whether to accept the invitation from Macau. Amid his longing for exceptional access and prestige, he remembers the cautions of Mrinal, Raghav, and Juliana. Although he feels the value of his skills during a language presentation, he tries not to go beyond the pages assigned to him. Raghav identifies two ambiguous clauses on confidentiality and assistance in a proposed six-month consultancy arrangement. The centre of the impending decision is no longer the technical screen but the words of the contract.

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Chapter 37 — Contracts and Shadows — 11

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Raghav Bhasin compares the Chinese and English copies of the proposed six-month overseas consultancy. Clauses concerning ambiguous participation, confidentiality, and possible financial liability are revised. Shashank thinks that insisting on clear boundaries may cause the client to withdraw the offer, but he signs the restricted, revised version. Mrinal helps him recognise the value of rules above the value of opportunity. Meanwhile, another uncertain message about stopping a matter on instructions from “above” appears in a government file. Rather than assign blame from resemblance alone, Shashank preserves the message.

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Chapter 38 — Contracts and Shadows — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya notices similar language in the statement about stopping a matter in a government file and a message from the foreign party, but does not establish a causal connection between the two. After consulting Mrinal and Juliana, Shashank writes down separately the original message’s time, source, and possible meanings. It is unresolved whether limited information from a government office escaped or someone merely made an astute guess. The chapter focuses on the distance between shadow, resemblance, and actual evidence. Shashank learns to find the source first and identify an individual only afterward.

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Chapter 39 — Contracts and Shadows — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An anonymous message claims that an objection from a lower office was suppressed in a sealed GST file. Aditya shows Shashank the index of the restricted inspection and the limits of publicly available records. They look for evidence supporting a newspaper's assertion that material was "suppressed," but neither the anonymous sender nor a definite leak is established. Because of his humiliation, Shashank wants to respond forcefully, yet keeps the different levels of inference distinct. An indication arises that this linguistic shadow will be tested at the next court hearing.

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Chapter 40 — The Cantonese Gateway — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In court, Shashank is questioned about the service agreement of the company Vivo, Chinese-language assistance, and connections involving Cantonese-speaking parties. He clarifies the differences between standard Chinese, Cantonese, and expressions used for commercial services. He emphasises that the general term “technical services” does not prove corporate partnership, financial control, or beneficial ownership. He admits his earlier tendency to soften words for his own convenience. The investigation advances towards the next stage of digital seizure.

Chapter 41 — The Cantonese Gateway — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya examines older digital fragments relating to Shashank’s language services, audio messages, and references to Cantonese. In one recording, Shashank is heard saying that he had simplified a difficult expression. He acknowledges that the voice and comment are his, but independent evidence is needed to show what decision, if any, was changed or what illegal act was carried out as a result. Shashank recognises the pressure of his ambition. The chapter establishes an image of the linguistic gateway and the separate documentary domain of economic ownership.

Chapter 42 — The Vivo Gate

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At the Vivo premises in Noida, Shashank and Aditya compare authenticated company records, payment lists, and bilingual agreements. They avoid automatically connecting the company's service arrangements with other disputed vendors or contexts associated with gambling. Shashank again clarifies the difference between "contact" and "control." When Mrinal's name or a familiar reference appears in some records, his attention turns abruptly to their friendship. The investigation's questions are becoming personal for him rather than merely professional.

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Chapter 43 — The Cantonese Gateway — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Questions arise about a possible connection involving Mrinal within payment gateways, third-party accounts, and message chains. Shashank is caught between his instinctive wish to prove his friend innocent and his fear of treating every financial indication as proof of wrongdoing. Aditya considers the independent meaning of each paper. Mrinal makes clear that advancing an unsupported inference in a friend’s favour is also a betrayal of trust. The chapter presents the defence of friendship not as hiding facts but as investigating each person’s role through independent evidence.

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Chapter 44 — The Cantonese Gateway — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Confronted with the records of his first and later demonstrations in Macau, Shashank re-examines his memory of having special access. Opening, viewing, and commenting on a guest interface are distinguished from operating, controlling, or owning the system. He realises that a declaration such as “this work could not be done without me” may have been a creation of his own pride. The available material reveals an actual error such as his breach of access limits, but any claim of participation in a broader offence calls for independent inquiry. After greed, fear once again becomes dominant.

Chapter 45 — The Cantonese Gateway — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At Raghav’s office, confidential legal advice and later messages about business operations are examined separately. Shashank recognises a distinction between the language of his translated summaries and the advice actually given by the lawyer. In conversations with Juliana and Mrinal, he admits that saying “everything is fine” can sometimes create an improper impression of legal approval. A new message highlights the difference between the objection of a lower commissioner’s office and oral directions from above. The chapter preserves a documentary boundary between confidentiality and the suspicion of betrayal.

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Chapter 46 — The Cantonese Gateway — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The written demand for verification from an officer in a lower commissioner’s office is compared with instructions from above to reduce the matter’s priority. Shashank’s anger easily drives him toward naming someone a criminal, but Aditya reminds him that Shashank himself has softened language in the past; this resemblance cannot establish another person’s intention. On the basis of Mrinal’s warning and the available sequence of document versions, the allegation of betrayal remains a question rather than a finding. A new possibility of public humiliation emerges.

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Chapter 47 — The Cantonese Gateway — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An unknown message asks whether Shashank had been described as “a link between two networks.” He points out the ambiguity of “link”: it might mean a linguistic connection, an acquaintance, a business relation, or a financial relationship. Aditya distinguishes news coverage, available records, and the levels of actual contact. Mrinal understands Shashank’s anger but advises a restricted reply. The next question before the court will concern not only who used the word but how far it is legitimate to infer something from words that have been cut and edited.

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Chapter 48 — From Mandarin to Cantonese

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In court, cross-examination addresses the linguistic differences between Mandarin and Cantonese, a purported photograph of sealed material, and the source of its public adaptation. Shashank explains that similar words or visual likeness are not conclusive evidence of a common source. He acknowledges certain earlier interpretive shortcuts, but confines judicial conclusions to the documents available. The court decides the direction for further comparison of devices, statements, and original records. For Shashank, the value of linguistic understanding lies not in self-proclaimed power but in limits that can be examined.

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Chapter 49 — The Cantonese Gateway — 10

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At the court's direction, Shashank's statement is recorded again and the seizure inventory of two digital devices is read aloud. He requests corrections concerning his earlier wording, the chronology of the records, and interpretative additions to his original statement. Aditya refuses to treat every recollection as an immediately established fact. Shashank makes his replies less ornate and more exact. Toward the end he remembers an old incident involving a vendor associated with a gambling application. That memory remains a lead awaiting confirmation from documentary evidence rather than a finding in its own right.

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Chapter 50 — The Gambling App Vendor

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Prompted by a notation reading “L-W/vendor,” Shashank remembers an acquaintance called Li Wenchao and an earlier meeting about a vendor for a gambling-related application. Aditya distinguishes the offer of work, language assistance, payments received, and economic ownership. Shashank acknowledges that he wanted a more important position in a conversation that had begun with a limited linguistic role. A suggestion that Mrinal should be brought into the work had also arisen. The chapter does not yet determine the full nature of the vendor connection; instead, it identifies the separate links of meetings, documents, and money that must be examined next.

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Chapter 51 — The Cantonese Gateway — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Shashank's and Mrinal's separate statements are examined alongside old emails, payment receipts, and portions of service contracts. Questions arise about their acquaintance with Li Wenchao, the introduction of Mrinal's name, and the boundaries of language work. Shashank realises that introducing a friend may be an ordinary social gesture, while a written record can make it appear to be an institutional relationship. He cannot reduce his attraction to money and prestige to a single simple motive. The factual circumstances of his earlier foreign travel become the subject of the next round of verification.

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Chapter 52 — The Cantonese Gateway — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Passport entries, flight bookings, hotel records, the Macau meeting schedule, and logs of limited system access are compared with Shashank's recollections. He describes the foreign building, a language presentation, and his use of a guest account. He admits that hearing of “special access” tempted him to depict his own access as greater than it really was. The investigators distinguish a guest's permission to observe from authority to conduct financial or administrative operations. Papers connected with Raghav Bhasin provide the starting point for the next question.

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Chapter 53 — The Macau Mirror — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A file labelled “confidential legal review” is examined for the relationship among Raghav, the foreign group, and Shashank's translated summaries. The word “confidential” on a document is not by itself proof either of legal protection or of criminal wrongdoing. Aditya checks versions, chronology, permissions, and signs of separate business operations. Shashank resists the temptation to fill missing facts through inference to the best explanation. Two forms of a document derived from what appears to be the same original suggest different conclusions, and the correct source remains to be established.

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Chapter 54 — The Macau Mirror — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An original tax notice from the lower commissioner's office and a circulated version from the upper tax-intelligence branch have the same heading and date but differ in their conclusions and cautionary language. Shashank initially says that “someone edited it,” then admits that the evidence does not establish who did so or when. There are gaps in the chronology of receipt and circulation. Aditya demonstrates a documentary discrepancy without immediately declaring an intentional effort to conceal an offence. The danger emerges that a news report might misuse this difference.

Chapter 55 — The Macau Mirror — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya places a permission-restricted portion of the sealed material before Shashank and Raghav. They see how decisively a report speaks in public while the original document uses a more cautious formulation. Shashank feels that a conspiracy against him has been organised, yet acknowledges that information might have been assembled from several sources. Raghav questions the public claims associated with his name. Preparations begin for cross-examination in court about the original text, successive drafts, and the published adaptation.

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Chapter 56 — The Macau Mirror — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The court compares a published news summary, its earlier drafts, and the original sealed passage. Shashank admits that he once used convenient linguistic formulations, but this does not establish an extensive financial role. The court does not issue a final finding of guilt or innocence; it examines the chain of sources and the reliability of successive adaptations. Shashank begins to focus less on the insult he has suffered and more on his actual responsibility for what he did. The next inquiry will examine digital traces on an old phone and laptop.

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Chapter 57 — The Macau Mirror — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Under a limited court order, Shashank's old mobile phone and laptop are seized and preserved copies from a specified period are examined. His messages and draft translations reveal a tendency to magnify his own importance. He admits to that ambition, while the need for independent evidence of financial control in the digital material remains clear. Old contracts, the vendor chain, and beneficial ownership become questions in a new form. Raghav's name again assumes significance as the investigators follow those separate strands.

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Chapter 58 — The Lawyer Who Does Not Understand Chinese

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At Aditya's office, Raghav Bhasin, Shashank, and Aditya examine the bilingual service agreement, the English draft, and the legal review. Raghav could not read the original Chinese, so it becomes necessary to determine where Shashank's translation was reliable and where it contained additions based on his own interpretation of the context. Raghav's legal comments cannot automatically be taken as approval of a foreign commercial structure. Shashank's linguistic role, the lawyer's professional responsibility, and the payment arrangements are separate matters. The next comparison will turn to the flow of funds and Mrinal's earlier acquaintance.

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Chapter 59 — The Macau Mirror — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A payment-gateway summary, an account list, incomplete remittance notes, and old messages are placed before Shashank. Mrinal's name repeatedly surfaces, but friendship gives no one the right to supply missing links in a documentary chain. Shashank distinguishes his recorded role from the question of who issued payment instructions. Mrinal likewise confines his recollection to the documents and facts he knows. Another invitation offering “special access” in Macau awakens Shashank's old desire to be seen as important.

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Chapter 60 — The Macau Mirror — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The records of a second journey to Macau, its meetings, and the temporary access granted to a system are examined. Shashank admits that he had transformed what was largely an ordinary translation assignment into the experience of having gained “inside access.” The available documents show that he viewed material, explained language, and delivered a limited presentation; they do not by themselves prove wider financial operations or criminal participation. The effect of Raghav's advice and the translated documents becomes the next question. Shashank attempts to measure the true extent of his desire for prestige.

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Chapter 61 — The Macau Mirror — 9

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

With the court's permission, Aditya examines the external chronology of legal consultation, differences among drafts, and Shashank's linguistic summaries. The protected substance of Raghav's confidential advice is not unnecessarily disclosed. A question arises whether the caution that beneficial ownership still needed verification had been weakened in Shashank's first summary. He acknowledges that the summary could be incomplete, but an intention to protect a crime has not been established. The story now turns toward institutional trust and revised tax records.

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Chapter 62 — A Night in Macau

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A reservation letter from the lower commissioner's office, the circulation list of the upper branch, and messages sent during one night in Macau are considered together in chronological order. Shashank recalls assigning great significance to an ambiguous message without first asking where it came from. Aditya refuses to infer a leak of confidential information merely from nearby dates or similar words. The central question becomes who knew what, and when. Shashank admits that what he received that night was not a confidential document but an unverified assertion.

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Chapter 63 — The Macau Mirror — 11

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A new public accusation calls Shashank the translator who carried Indian money to a Chinese gambling group. Although the original sealed passage acknowledges his role in linguistic communication, the actual control of accounts remains a separate question requiring verification. Raghav makes clear that Shashank's softened wording did not constitute the lawyer's approval. Shashank learns painfully that his own earlier self-promoting statements helped make a false public accusation appear credible. The distance between the original record and the newspaper's version becomes the next issue before the court.

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Chapter 64 — The Macau Mirror — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The court compares the original sealed summary with the newspaper report and its financial headings. Shashank explains that removing a cautionary sentence makes a role still under investigation appear to be an established role. Aditya acknowledges several possible sources; no particular leaker can be named without independent evidence. The court orders a separate examination of the source of the report's adaptation and a renewed limited review of messages found on an old device. Shashank maintains the distinction between admitting his actual mistakes and refusing larger allegations that have not been proved.

Chapter 65 — The Macau Mirror — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Under the court's order, old digital drafts, messages, and payment references are inspected again. In Shashank's own words, the wish to be an “insider,” the inflation of his role, and the performance of prestige become unmistakable. Instead of hiding his boasting, he acknowledges it, while demanding separate proof for claims that he controlled money. The investigation does not yet yield a complete verdict on a crime; it records the documentary traces of his ambition. The next narrative section turns to an extravagant birthday banquet.

Chapter 66 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

At a lavish birthday banquet, Shashank is honoured as a “special linguistic guest” among foreign visitors, businessmen, and celebrated artists. For a brief period on stage, translation feels to him like social power. Later, Aditya separately examines the invitation list, event service vendors, indications of payments, and the presence of the performers. Having a photograph taken with a famous person or sharing a stage is not proof of a business partnership. Shashank remembers Mrinal's warning to be careful. The stage had never belonged to him; for a few moments, only the voice had been his.

Chapter 67 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The banquet's payment records and old messages are compared with Mrinal's statement. Shashank recognises that his casual description of a friend as “my man” may have been socially effortless but legally misleading. Service fees, the organiser's payments, a separate institution, and Mrinal's legitimate participation must be kept distinct. Shashank accepts only relationships that the evidence permits, rather than a convenient overarching conclusion. Mrinal again asks when the trust between friends turned into a display of Shashank's prestige. The next episode returns to “special access” in Macau.

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Chapter 68 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

After the praise he receives at the banquet, Shashank recounts a further closed meeting in Macau. Travel records, visitor access, and a limited system interface are examined; the material on display also concerned gaming and betting. The evidence indicates that Shashank could observe and offer linguistic comments, but not independently operate the system. His earlier claim to much broader access does not agree with the records. He admits that reaching a table inside the room had led him arrogantly to imagine himself an owner of what lay inside. The limits of Raghav's confidential legal advice again come under scrutiny.

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Chapter 69 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The external chronology of legal consultations in Macau, Raghav Bhasin's attendance, and separate commercial messages are examined. His name appearing in an initial legal session does not mean that he participated in later payment or operations meetings. Questions remain about whether Shashank weakened legal caution in a linguistic summary, but evidence is still required before declaring anyone a participant in a crime. The inquiry moves towards payment gateways, objections from the lower commissioner's office, and references to hawala and digital assets.

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Chapter 70 — Hawala and Bitcoin

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya examines the question marks beside “hawala?” and “digital assets?” in reservations from the lower commissioner's office, the upper tax-intelligence summary, and payment-reconciliation slips. Shashank explains the ordinary meanings of financial terms used in the papers, but refuses to treat the mere presence of a term as proof of an illegal transfer. Some caution in the investigation appears to have been weakened in later summaries, raising a question of institutional trust. The chapter stresses the danger that publication of a sealed passage could turn a question mark denoting an inquiry into the full stop of a supposed conviction.

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Chapter 71 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A news report calls Shashank the “Indian facilitator of a hawala-Bitcoin banquet,” combining his stage photograph with unresolved questions from a government inquiry. Shashank identifies the difference between the cautious original sealed text and the categorical public headline. Aditya reviews his real translation errors separately from unproved claims about a broad financial crime. Mrinal restrains him from the opposite temptation to cleanse his past by saying that “everything is false.” Preparations begin for the court to compare the banquet photograph, original record, and public accusation.

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Chapter 72 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The court places the banquet photographs, the original questions in the sealed material, Shashank's bilingual summary, and the payment headings side by side. Shashank explains that receiving a fee for language services is not the same as owning the event financially, although the source of that fee can still be investigated. He admits his convenient alterations of wording but opposes treating allegations that extend beyond the evidence as established crimes. The court postpones a comprehensive decision and directs a limited fresh examination of the old digital material. His earlier messages boasting of importance will be tested next.

Chapter 73 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

On the old phone and computer and in preserved copies, Shashank's exaggerated claims emerge: “No decision is made without me,” and “I bring everyone together.” He acknowledges that he helped bridge the languages used in difficult meetings, but separate proof is needed to show that he possessed financial or administrative decision-making power. Aditya distinguishes actual participation, self-promotion, and an unproved financial role. Shashank is ready to accept responsibility for his boasting. The next question concerns the event contract and beneficial ownership.

Chapter 74 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 9

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya compares the event contract, hospitality vendor, payment instructions, and beneficial-ownership verification forms. Shashank admits that his proud claim to “know who the real owner is” had inflated his role. The documentary distinctions among contracting party, payer, service provider, and actual owner become clear. Whether his choice of words affected the meaning of a document is a matter for examination, but a word's influence does not constitute ownership. A reference linked to Mrinal's name opens the next question about the flow of money.

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Chapter 75 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 10

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The inquiry examines the banquet's payment gateway, limited information on intermediary accounts, incomplete notes about digital assets, and earlier correspondence with Mrinal. Present in person, Mrinal explains his legitimate reimbursement for services and his role as a friend. This time Shashank sees Mrinal's name as an independent factual question rather than as support for his own defence. Aditya insists that every link in the proposed chain of money transfers must be tested against evidence. The next session will again focus on Shashank's guest access in Macau and the claims he made on the birthday stage.

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Chapter 76 — The Birthday Stage

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

On the birthday stage, Shashank had boasted about his “special access.” His claims are compared with his Macau travel records, meeting lists, and the summary of system permissions. The documents identify him as a guest language reviewer; there is no sign that he could approve payments, change user privileges, or control the system independently. Mrinal testifies about the boasting on stage but does not turn it into evidence of a wider crime. Shashank acknowledges the distance between the pleasure of special entry and the possession of real authority. The next phase concerns confidential legal consultation.

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Chapter 77 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The external chronology of Raghav Bhasin's legal advice, Shashank's linguistic summaries, and separate business messages are scrutinised. Raghav explains that an unconditional phrase such as “the legal side is clear” does not accurately represent his professional advice. Some lines of Shashank's translation contain no error, and he refuses to attribute mistakes to himself where none has been shown. Raghav's presence at the banquet likewise does not demonstrate participation in financial decisions. The inquiry now turns towards the changing summaries produced by the tax-intelligence branch.

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Chapter 78 — Banquet, Deities, Humiliation — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The lower commissioner's original objection, intermediate drafts, the final summary from above, and the softened terminology that reached business parties are compared together. The lower officer asks why precautionary language diminished; Shashank explains the similarities to his own style but also the limits of his memory. The secured access list does not record Shashank directly entering the government system, yet this fact alone cannot prove whether information escaped by another route. Between the glitter of the banquet, legal anxiety, and institutional revisions, the narrative arrives at the importance of missing records.

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Chapter 79 — Cracks in the Compromise — 1

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Investigators search for the documents that should accompany the reduction of objections in the lower commissioner's office, public adaptations of sealed material, and the alleged internal collusion. Aditya and the officer explain that not finding evidence is not the same as showing that such evidence could not exist. Some affirmative presence records also contradict particular allegations. Shashank learns that an absent trace matters only where there is a reason to expect that the trace would normally have been available. The court schedules further cross-examination on this issue.

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Chapter 80 — Cracks in the Compromise — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The court examines access logs, revision history, authorisation lists, and the chronology of the original objection. The government raises questions about a missing explanatory note and possible unauthorised circulation of information. Shashank admits that he softened language, exaggerated special access, and traded on his proximity to famous people. Yet he understands that genuine repentance does not require him to accept every unproved accusation. The court emphasises what records should reasonably exist and how thoroughly they were sought. The next investigation returns to preserved digital copies.

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Chapter 81 — Cracks in the Compromise — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In response to a supplementary summons, data from a limited period on Shashank's old phone and computer are inspected. Investigators examine whether his claims to “inside access” are consistent with changes in tax records and the later public allegations. Shashank admits that he deliberately made some messages ambiguous so that his influence would appear greater. Conclusions, however, cannot extend beyond the material preserved in the available copy. A blank entry marked “ultimate beneficial owner: verification pending” reminds him of his old habit of guessing what records did not disclose.

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Chapter 82 — The Agency That Compromised

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya reviews the contractual sequence, vendor register, ownership declarations, and agency records. Some expected attachments are missing, but their absence does not automatically establish either criminal wrongdoing or complete innocence. Shashank's old boast that he “knew the real owner” resurfaces. Supporting papers for some payments are clear; those for others remain incomplete. Before describing an institutional arrangement as a compromise, the chapter separates failures of verification, rules of registration, and successive levels of responsibility.

Chapter 83 — Cracks in the Compromise — 5

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The payment gateway, intermediary accounts, references marked with questions about hawala, digital assets, and Mrinal's old messages are examined together. Mrinal asks whether Shashank wanted a friend or a stamp validating the story he told about himself. Legitimate reimbursements are recorded separately. Investigators look for the instructions, benefits, and signs of control that should support allegations of financial operation. Shashank neither lowers the standard of proof for his friend nor treats the presence of a suspicious name as proof of guilt. The next issue is his claimed breadth of access in Macau.

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Chapter 84 — Cracks in the Compromise — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Preserved records of Shashank's journey to Macau, hotel stay, visitor pass, meetings, and limited system access are examined. His earlier statement that he “saw an inside screen” cannot be translated into a claim that he “operated the server.” The available traces show permission to act as a guest linguistic reviewer; the additional signs needed to demonstrate broad administrative control have not been found. Shashank acknowledges the lure of exceptional access but understands that entering a place does not make him its owner. The next question concerns legal confidentiality and participation.

Chapter 85 — Cracks in the Compromise — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Raghav's attendance, the external chronology of confidential legal meetings, fees, and subsequent business messages are examined. Shashank admits that his summaries, such as “the lawyer agrees” and “everything is clear,” understated the actual legal cautions. Yet treating legitimate legal advice as a plan for criminal wrongdoing requires independent evidence of operations, profit, instructions, or a shared purpose. Protected material is not disclosed without permission. Shashank's responsibility for wording remains separate from Raghav's role as lawyer. The story returns to the question of institutional resistance.

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Chapter 86 — Cracks in the Compromise — 8

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The full sequence of versions of the lower commissioner's original reservations and the upper tax-intelligence summary is examined, together with the allocation of tasks and meeting notes. Some questions were softened, but traces show that some investigative work continued. The broad claim that “all opposition was crushed” therefore does not fit the available material. Shashank admits to having softened language himself but will not use that analogy to prove institutional crime by another person. Unsupported expansions in public news reports become the next subject for scrutiny.

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Chapter 87 — Cracks in the Compromise — 9

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Aditya examines the fundamental difference between the sealed record and allegations printed in the news. One public headline asserts a specific government connection or financial control, but the identifiable source and official traces needed to support it are insufficient. The lower official also explains how the newspaper exaggerated his original statement. Shashank resolves not to answer humiliation by inventing unproved charges against someone else. At the next session, an investigator from another village in Mithila will turn Shashank's own method of reasoning back upon him.

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Chapter 88 — The Investigator from Another Village

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An officer from Mithila serving in the lower commissioner's office asks Shashank to apply to his own account the same method of reasoning he uses in his defence. If he truly had decisive authority over large financial operations, what traces should one expect in contracts, approvals, benefits, access, and instructions? The officer also examines the limits of his own conclusions. Shashank sees that the method associated with Gangesha once furnished him with linguistic power, but is now cutting away the shadow of his inflated image of himself.

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Chapter 89 — Cracks in the Compromise — 11

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Following a summons, Shashank's old messages claiming to be “decisive,” an “insider,” and someone “without whom nothing could happen” are compared with seized records. He plainly acknowledges that he sought to enhance his reputation. There is evidence that he was genuinely useful as a linguistic coordinator, but the indications of his purported broader control must be examined separately. Because some digital channels are incomplete, it is also improper to conclude that no such evidence could possibly exist. His self-promotion remains on record; the question of where actual power lay remains open.

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Chapter 90 — Cracks in the Compromise — 12

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Contracts, the vendor route, original bilingual summaries, later risk notes, and demands to verify beneficial ownership are compared. It appears possible that a general linguistic inference made by Shashank acquired the force of a more definite statement of ownership in a later document. He admits that the initial summary went beyond what he knew, while the purpose and consequences of the error require separate inquiry. The officer teaches him to observe limits even in self-accusation. Words can look like power when unaccompanied by evidence, but they do not become actual control.

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Chapter 91 — Cracks in the Compromise — 13

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

Records concerning intermediary accounts, payment gateways, hawala, and digital assets are examined again. Receipts for Mrinal's legitimate travel, meals, and linguistic reimbursements are kept separate. An old message from Shashank contains an inflated claim that he handled local payments, but the independent links proving actual control of funds have not been conclusively established. He will neither cut facts to protect Mrinal nor add names merely to make someone appear guilty. Tension persists between the trust of friendship and the discipline of evidence.

Chapter 92 — From Friendship to Enmity

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

An integrated review begins of Shashank's Macau travel, limited guest access, and sweeping claims about his role. The lower officer from Mithila places the actual permission records against Shashank's earlier statements about being “inside.” Although he acknowledges his greed for status, Shashank opposes unlimited extensions of guilt based on those words. Some searching questions make him feel that friendship has turned into hostility, but he recognises that evidence does not take anyone's side. The next stage concerns the limits of deciding whether Raghav's confidential advice could amount to participation.

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Chapter 93 — Two Navya Nyayas — 2

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The protected content of Raghav Bhasin's legal consultation is kept distinct from the external circumstances of its timing, fees, business messages, and subsequent conduct. Shashank's phrase “the legal side is clear” was his own summary, not the lawyer's definitive approval. Proving participation in an actual crime requires independent indications beyond the silence protected by legal confidentiality. Shashank admits that he borrowed Raghav's name to amplify his own importance, but that fact neither reduces the seriousness of a crime nor automatically increases another person's culpability.

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Chapter 94 — Two Navya Nyayas — 3

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The lower commissioner's objections, intermediate drafts, upper tax summaries, orders assigning tasks, and meeting records are reviewed together. Some cautionary sentences were weakened while some verification work continued. The officer refuses to reduce this complex history either to a complete institutional conspiracy or to a perfectly unblemished process. Shashank sees that a single standard of evidence must be applied to arguments both for and against himself. The distinction between the “two Navya Nyayas” diminishes under the discipline of impartial judgment.

Chapter 95 — Two Navya Nyayas — 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The public accusations against Shashank are divided into established facts, plausible inferences, unsupported extensions, and claims whose sources are undetermined. The inquiry classifies what is actually proved about the banquet, Macau, sealed documents, and his old self-promotion. Shashank admits that his boasting lent credibility to public misunderstandings, but not every allegation in a news report thereby becomes true. It would be wrong both to hide his own mistakes to save his reputation and to let unfounded additions by others pass unchallenged. The next chapter tests this classification in court.

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Chapter 96 — False Accusations

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

The court examines the basis for a public headline calling Shashank the “financial controller of a foreign gambling network.” Shashank distinguishes in legal terms among a statement contrary to fact, one without foundation, and one made deliberately falsely. He does not deny his actual boasting, softened language, or coordination work, but he also refuses to accept financial ownership beyond what the evidence demonstrates. Without issuing a final ruling on intent, the court specifies the boundaries of both sources and statements. Shashank recognises that he must neither diminish his real faults nor enlarge them without cause.

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Chapter 97 — Two Navya Nyayas — 6

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In a supplementary statement, an expression in seized digital material implying that “the important people came through me” is examined again. Some significant linguistic exchanges did pass through Shashank, but not every business decision depended on him. The officer revises a draft decision so that a broad claim is not simply labelled “proved false”; instead, the exact limit of the available evidence is recorded. Shashank accepts his exaggeration without unnecessarily attributing further possible mistakes to himself. The lesson deepens that every sentence in a judicial finding must rest on its own independent proof.

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Chapter 98 — Two Navya Nyayas — 7

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

A service contract, vendor registration, and customer-identification forms reveal different aspects of one business relationship. Shashank acknowledges that his earlier sweeping statement about the “real owner” exceeded his knowledge. Whether he knowingly concealed a particular contrary fact remains a separate matter of proof. Aditya and the officer from Mithila examine each name, signature, sign of benefit, and mark of authority individually. Nuance in language becomes just only when it is confirmed by specific records and by the relationships between the people named in them.

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Chapter 99 — The Final Test of Navya Nyaya

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

In the final financial classification, questions arise about payment gateways, intermediary accounts, references to hawala, digital assets, and Mrinal's initials, “M.K.” Records of lawful reimbursement are found, but initials alone cannot establish a person's identity or criminal connection. Shashank wants to remove the description of his risky self-promotion and the financial circumstances that properly invite investigation, yet leaves in place the difficult sentences that the evidence supports. He does not change the rules to favour a friend. The final test is to apply the same standard of proof to a beloved name and to his own actual faults.

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Chapter 100 — The Translator's Decision

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

1 / 2

On the day of judgment, the court considers Shashank's genuine linguistic mistakes, access beyond his permitted limits, self-promotion, accusations about his financial role, and gaps in the documentary record at different levels. Some matters have been admitted or established; other claims remain unproved for lack of independent corroboration. Mrinal's legitimate reimbursements and ambiguous initials are not treated as sufficient grounds for guilt. Shashank's relationships with Aditya, Raghav, the investigator from Mithila, and Mrinal acquire a new perspective. In his final note, he writes that a translator's right decision is not to twist words for personal advantage, but to keep every word within the limits justified by its

Chapter 100 — The Translator's Decision

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

evidence. The ending offers no declaration of victory, only difficult self-acknowledgment and a calm that follows the judicial process.

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WORK / कृति

05 · Jal-Panji (The Water Register)

48 Chapters

Chapter 1 — Kusaha

On 18 August 2008, news of a breach in the Kosi's eastern embankment at Kusaha enters Ramanugrah Mishra's diary in stages, through telephone calls, uncertain reports, and time-stamped notes. His son Mohan, employed in the Water Resources Department, speaks about warnings before the erosion, the need to save documents, and the danger that the village may have to be evacuated. Ramanugrah examines an old map, the survey list of 1963, and the genealogical register kept at home, but uncertainty about official decisions persists. People are leaving their houses; he places the manuscripts on a higher shelf and closes his diary. His final entry describes the manuscripts as 'safe,' but afterward a red line is drawn beneath that word.

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Chapter 2 — The Bundle of Manuscripts

On 19 August, the boatman Bhola Sahni brings Ramanugrah an unidentified, water-soaked bundle of genealogical registers recovered from the flood. It contains palm-leaf folios, old papers, string, a coin, slips recording marriages and births, and many damaged leaves. Ramanugrah refuses to turn anybody's conjecture into fact; instead, he records a preliminary inventory of the objects and measures for their preservation. As the pages dry, three names appear, each followed by an empty space. Bhola is recorded as the witness to the bundle's discovery. The central question emerges here: did the water erase the letters, or was there already something unspoken in the history of these pages?

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Chapter 3 — The Genealogist's Method

Before reading the wet records, Ramanugrah sets out his working method as a panjikar, or genealogical registrar, under seven headings: identity, ancestral origin, village, entitlement, relationship, testimony, and record. He explains that memory, oral accounts, government papers, and old entries do not possess equal evidentiary weight, and that conjecture must not be inserted where the source is indistinct. He stresses the importance of maternal relationships when examining marriages, changing village names, and the discipline of never erasing an original entry. The blank spaces beside the three names are reconsidered under these rules. He suspends the assumption that the damage must have been caused by water and confronts the

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Chapter 3 — The Genealogist's Method

difficulty of remaining impartial while investigating his own family's records.

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Chapter 4 — Kosi — 1

In this chapter the Kosi speaks in the first person. Describing its current, sand, silt, abandoned channels, floodplain, and the pressure of embankments, the river reveals its unstable place within boundaries made by human beings. People maintain fixed records of land, lineage, caste, and rights, while the river periodically covers their physical markers or brings them back into view. It does not adjudicate anybody's name; it knows only gradients and the pressure of water. In this voice, the crisis at Kusaha and the uncertain letters on the soaked genealogical leaves become parts of the same landscape.

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Chapter 5 — Three Names

Ramanugrah reads three names on the wet page: Shridhar Mishra, Ratneshwar Jha, and Jayanarayan Mishra. He copies only those portions of their fathers' and grandfathers' names, ancestral origins, and villages that can be read clearly. Beyond those details, the three lines of descent are incomplete in different ways. Examining stains, scratches, and blanks in the paper, he withholds judgment among water damage, abrasion, and deliberate erasure. The copy is labelled provisional. The chapter shows a genealogist's caution against the temptation to use an invented story to fill a gap in the evidence.

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Chapter 6 — Mohan's Telephone Call

Calls and messages from Mohan at the relief camp pull Ramanugrah's anxiety in two directions: his son's safety and the administrative responsibility for the embankment. Lists prepared at the camp disagree over the names, villages, and neighbourhoods of displaced families. Mohan advises his father not to leave the house, to drink clean water, and to keep medicines ready; Ramanugrah asks about his son's departmental role in the Kusaha area. Mohan's answers remain limited and incomplete. A disagreement arises between them over the claims that 'an opinion is not evidence' and that 'not every fact is written on paper.' The effort to keep established facts separate from a family's fears is central to the chapter.

Chapter 7 — The Relief Camp

At Subhash's urging, Ramanugrah visits the flood-relief camp established in a school. There he finds that registration and distribution registers contain different names for the same village, that displaced people without papers face difficulties, and that some families have been omitted altogether. Using his old village lists, the genealogist helps identify pronunciations and locations, but makes no claim to certify anyone's eligibility for government relief. Mohan and his father see that a missing name on a relief list can immediately mean the loss of food or assistance. After returning home, Ramanugrah asks whether 'not finding a name' and 'a name not being written down' are the same thing.

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Chapter 8 — The Erased Line

Close examination of the drying page convinces Ramanugrah that the space after Shridhar Mishra's name was not merely soaked: the paper's surface had been rubbed to remove writing. Two slanting marks in the register, the letter forms, numerals, and corrections strongly resemble the handwriting of Ramanugrah's great-grandfather. The blank portions beside Ratneshwar and Jayanarayan appear to have other causes. He shows Mohan the findings without claiming to know the motive. A distinction emerges between correction and obliteration. The possibility that the hand which erased the entry belonged to his own lineage turns the archival investigation into a family question.

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Chapter 9 — When the Earth Shook

The narrator presents different elders' memories of the earthquake of 15 January 1934. Ramanugrah's grandfather remembers the sound of a falling water vessel; his grandmother recalls a bell and the cowshed; Budhan Sada speaks of people from different castes spending the night together in an open field. After the earthquake, houses, lanes, and neighbourhoods shifted position, but social inequality did not disappear. Ramanugrah considers both memory and written records incomplete. At the chapter's end there is a suggestion that another incident occurred in 1934, beyond the earthquake itself, about which the village elders remained silent.

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Chapter 10 — Witness One: The Priest

The first witness, the priest Harinarayan Jha, refuses to recognize the incident involving Phuljhari in 1934 as a formally solemnized marriage. In his account, the mantras, sacred fire, kanyadan, family consent, and authority under the genealogical register were absent; yet his testimony also reveals that Phuljhari expressed her own wishes. His account contains several inconsistencies about the time he was present, the objects he saw, and the limits of his role. Ramanugrah records the priest's self-justifications separately from what he directly experienced. Phuljhari's alleged question —'Where is my wish written in the register?'—becomes the moral centre of the evidence, although her exact words cannot be authenticated.

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Chapter 11 — Witness Two: The Elder Sister-in-law

Phuljhari's elder sister-in-law Kamala Devi remembers the events of 1934 through the kitchen, hearth, plate, bottle of oil, and the routines of domestic life. She says that Phuljhari left home before evening, returned after the episode at the shrine, repeated her decision before the senior men of the family, and vanished from sight later that night. Kamala Devi did not approve of Phuljhari's decision, yet she does not want to alter what she witnessed. The anger of the men and her own advice that Phuljhari 'wait until morning' suggest a fear of impending harm. Her statement, however, does not conclusively prove that a crime occurred.

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Chapter 12 — Kosi — 2

In the second Kosi chapter, the river traces the long relationship among the earthquake, fine fissures in the ground, the inclination of the soil, and the rains. One event survives in different sequences in human memory, while the effects of altered layers below the earth continue into later years. The priest's scriptural language, a sister-in-law's domestic recollections, and a farm worker's bodily experience provide different media of witness. Where a written record seeks a single date, the river's voice suggests that geography may have many dates. Finally, the narrative points toward evidence borne by the hands that plough the fields.

Chapter 13 — Witness Three: The Ploughman

The third witness, Budhan Sada, a ploughman from the Musahar settlement, speaks of the relationship between Phuljhari and Jagesar Sada in the language of his own experience as an agricultural labourer. According to him, the two had decided to live together. Later contradictory stories circulated in the village: that 'the two ran away' and that 'Jagesar went to Nepal.' Budhan says he saw a bloodstained body at night, but he cannot directly establish whose body it was or who caused the injury. He challenges the established social ownership of names: why should written records belong only to landowners? Ramanugrah preserves both the limits of the testimony and what remains unsaid.

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Chapter 14 — Witness Four: The Genealogist

Rather than conventional prose, this chapter takes the form of a disputed genealogical register page from 1934. The original record mentioned Phuljhari, daughter of Shridhar Mishra, a claim that she had entered a domestic union with Jagesar Sada, disagreement about marriage rites, and news of a calamity that night. Concern for the family's social standing and possible marriage disputes involving its other children led to pressure to delete the relationship entry. First one passage, then a second and a third, were rubbed away. Phuljhari's name and the mention of Jagesar vanished from the principal line. The later clean copy did not even preserve the history of the rubbing. The record itself reveals the process by which a name was

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Chapter 14 — Witness Four: The Genealogist

systematically erased.

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Chapter 15 — What Was Never Written

Ramanugrah places four sources side by side—the priest, Kamala Devi, Budhan Sada, and the genealogical page—and lists agreements and contradictions concerning time, objects, presence, desire, and the reported calamity. The plate, red thread, house veranda, shrine, Jagesar's name, and movements that night carry different meanings in different accounts. Several sources support the conclusion that Phuljhari expressed her decision; they do not conclusively establish the legal or ritual standing of the union, what occurred that night, or whether there was a death or a flight. The chapter leaves the remaining questions blank and makes the silence of the records visible instead of concealing it.

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Chapter 16 — The Flood of 1934

A flood some months after the 1934 earthquake changes the location of the southern Musahar settlement. Ramanugrah compares a list of damaged houses, a food-relief ledger, and copies of land-revenue records. A place formerly marked 'Musahar settlement' appears as 'sandy fallow land' in a later revenue document; the descriptions of displaced families also change. The social consequences of the absence of Jagesar's name and those of his family become clear. The text distinguishes physical erasure by river water from the deliberate scraping away of a genealogical entry by a registrar's hand. The erosion of local geographical history becomes inseparable from the erosion of family records.

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Chapter 17 — The Treaty

In 1954, news of the India–Nepal Kosi Agreement reaches the village in several unverified forms. Surveyors measure fields, ponds, settlements, and old river channels; red pegs, lines, and new papers intrude upon everyday places. Young Ramanugrah becomes involved in questions about names, villages, and former habitation because of his skill in reading genealogical registers. Reports from different sources, people's fears about their land, and the language of government schemes collide. The chapter shows how easily a word or an entire neighbourhood can be suspended from recognition on a map.

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Chapter 18 — The Map

After the survey, maps and revenue ledgers are spread out on the village headman's veranda. Ramanugrah is offered seven days' paid work reading local village names. Reconciling the names on old maps, revenue boundaries, inhabited settlements, and local pronunciations is not simple. Officials enter general expressions such as 'former habitation,' which may omit the identity of a particular neighbourhood. During these seven days, Ramanugrah observes closely how a state record is made. The chapter closes by distinguishing what is recorded on a government map from the genealogical register's knowledge: neither contains the other's entire world.

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Chapter 19 — Kosi — 3

In its third appearance as narrator, the Kosi describes the relationship between the straight lines of a survey and the embankments rising on the ground. As the banks are constructed, a new social geography of 'inside' and 'outside' emerges. Fields, river landings, marriage routes, the movement of cattle, and even funeral processions change. The river itself does not read administrative boundaries; it registers soil moisture, obstructions, drainage, and pressure. Embankments offer people a promise of safety, yet the accumulation of water, abandoned channels, and changing slopes cannot be made entirely stable.

Chapter 20 — The Villages Inside

Around 1958, villages enclosed between the embankments begin to be called the 'inside villages.' People from five villages approach Ramanugrah to draft petitions to the administration. The interests of householders, agricultural workers, and landless families cannot be accommodated equally within the boxes of government forms. Between offices, documents, forwarding procedures, and the duties of separate departments, their actual hardship remains unresolved. Questions about settlement and livelihood for labourers such as Budhan find no easy place on paper. In the end, the file departs along its official route, while the villages inside the embankments remain exactly where they are.

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Chapter 21 — Two Mithilas

During the construction of the Bhimnagar barrage, a wedding procession destined for a village in Saptari is stopped at the border. The genealogical register clearly establishes the compatibility of bride and groom by lineage, but the border official's questions concern not kinship but the objects packed in the wedding party's trunks, countries, and cross-border movement. Ramanugrah prepares an inventory of the luggage in addition to the marriage documents. The wedding takes place, yet the administrative writing of India and Nepal classifies relationships differently. The experience makes visible the tension between the cultural unity of 'two Mithilas' and their division by states.

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Chapter 22 — Marriage

Ramanugrah's own marriage to Sharda Jha is arranged. Because the genealogist is now himself a party to the marriage, his grandfather instructs that another registrar must undertake the final verification and entry of the relationship. The marriage takes place after careful attention to correspondence, ancestral villages, maternal kinship, prohibited relationships, and witnesses. One portion of the chapter is presented as a formal entry in the marriage register. At the end, the hesitant silence of the newly married couple in their room is recorded. The chapter reveals the distance between archival formalities and the living, private moment of a relationship.

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Chapter 23 — The Famine of 1966

Ramanugrah recounts the famine of 1966 not through official rainfall figures but through his household expense book. Quantities of rice, lentils, ghee, oil, jaggery, and salt decline; debts to the shopkeeper mount; worries over fodder, seed, and the next planting season converge. When four-year-old Mohan spills some salt, Sharda even gathers up the salt that can be cleaned of soil. This small incident conveys the daily severity of scarcity. Births and marriages continue to be entered in the genealogical register, but the real effects of famine are preserved in the household accounts and in the things used for cooking.

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Chapter 24 — The Engineer Sahib

On the day of Mohan's birth in 1962, two documents reach the house: a list of supplies required for Sharda's childbirth and a government tender for embankment maintenance and repairs. Ramanugrah worries about the delivery on one side and, on the other, reads aloud the vocabulary of earth, sacks, boulders, contracts, and measurements. The delivery is successful, and Mohan's name is entered in the family line. The contemporary embankment repair order remains on a separate sheet. The narrator recalls the future fact that Mohan will become an engineer, but does not describe the two events as causally connected at the time.

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Chapter 25 — Silence

In 'Silence,' the narrative moves away from its established archival voice to present a woman's mute and sensory experience of her body. Earth after the earthquake, a crack in a wall, smoke from the hearth, bodily pain, a water pot, sari, earring, comb, and the touch of evening are recorded in succession. There is no clear confession or conclusion concerning an incident. The movement of the day is formed through bodily warmth, labour, fear, and silence. This chapter makes room for an area of experience that is not ordinarily entered in the genealogical register's columns for origin, village, or entitlement.

Chapter 26 — Kosi — 4

The fourth voice of the Kosi speaks of layers of ash, bone, teeth, brick, and silt buried in the ground. The river understands the weight and shape of objects and the force that carries them, but it does not decide human identity, guilt, or innocence. Bones uncovered by sand send people back to examine old places and testimony. Its voice establishes a questioning relationship between 'the remains of a body' and 'an incomplete record of a name.' Yet the river itself gives no bone the name of Phuljhari or Jagesar.

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Chapter 27 — Anuradha's First Voice Message

Between night shifts at a Delhi hospital, Anuradha sends her grandfather her first voice message. She worries about Ramanugrah's health, medicine, meals, and the precautions needed when handling wet pages. Hospital registers, prescriptions, patients' names, emergency contact numbers, and waiting relatives reveal to her a new resemblance to her grandfather's system of genealogical record keeping. She says she wants to come home and hear about the three old names. Family affection and the responsibility of preserving records are joined in her message.

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Chapter 28 — The Body and Caste

Ramanugrah reflects on caste, the right to marry, and bodily experience. Genealogical registers record birth, father, husband, lineage, and eligibility for marriage, but childbirth, labour, wounds, desire, and personal bodily experience mostly remain outside them. The silent female experience in Chapter 25 stands alongside this absence. Seeing that Shridhar's erased line may be connected to a hand from his own family places the narrator's impartiality under sharper strain. He keeps seven kinds of evidence separate: damage to the paper, ink, handwriting, copies, oral accounts, indications of violence, and the location of the bones. His final judgment remains suspended.

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Chapter 29 — The Second Voice Message

In her second voice message, Anuradha says that photographs sent by Mohan have shown her the names of Shridhar, Phuljhari, and Jagesar. She asks her grandfather four direct questions: Phuljhari's place in the family, her relationship with Jagesar, Harinarayan's role, and the grounds for erasing the line. Her concern is not to reinterpret caste rules but to establish the family's responsibility for excluding a woman's name from its history. She distinguishes a person's right to remain silent voluntarily from silence imposed by somebody else. Ramanugrah's long, unanswered silence now confronts the questions of a new generation.

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Chapter 30 — The Bone

When the floodwaters recede in 2008, labourers find pieces of bone in the soil near a rough relief road. Preliminary procedures involving the police, local witnesses, and medical examination preserve the sequence of site, distance, soil, date, and recovered objects. Ramanugrah arrives with a map of the former Musahar settlement. There is a partial geographical match, but the body's identity remains unknown. The remains may be human, but testing is still pending. No evidence warrants linking them to Phuljhari or Jagesar. What the river has uncovered revives the old dispute without resolving it.

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Chapter 31 — Mohan's Confession

After the discovery of the bones, Mohan brings his father copies of old departmental files and a measurement book. He admits that in 2007 he entered quantities different from those actually used in embankment maintenance work and accepted improper cash payments. Some of the money was spent on household debts and Anuradha's education, but its purpose does not change the fact of the false entries. Ramanugrah records Mohan's statement and signature, while also noting the need for independent verification. This confession is not an answer to the 1934 Phuljhari–Jagesar episode; it concerns a separate responsibility attached to Mohan's own signature.

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Chapter 32 — Those Without Names

After examining Mohan's signed confession and the erased family line, Ramanugrah opens a new green-bound volume, the 'counter-register' or prati-panji. It is neither a copy of the original genealogical register nor a new, indisputable history written against it. Instead, it will record names omitted from the original, evidence, questions, and blanks. The scratched-out entry after Shridhar, the resemblance to Harinarayan's handwriting, the disputed status of the marriage, the unidentified bones, and the limits of the sources are entered separately. The counter-register challenges the original record's claim to sole authority without declaring an unproven story to be true.

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Chapter 33 — Muscat

Anuradha decides to look for work in Muscat after calculating her nursing salary in Delhi against her debts, housing costs, and expenses. She carefully checks the recruiting agent's fees, the contract, hospital name, government registration, passport, and travel papers. After arriving in Muscat, she sends her family only two brief assurances: 'I have arrived' and 'I have all my documents with me.' The old questions about Phuljhari are left half-answered. Her journey abroad offers the possibility of personal earnings, but is surrounded by new administrative records and the old silence of her family.

Chapter 34 — Kosi — 5

In the fifth river chapter, the Kosi speaks as a witness to emptying houses, employment far from home, locked doors, and declining traffic at the river landing. Labour in distant places such as Punjab, Delhi, Kathmandu, and Muscat returns to the village as bank transfers, medicines, roofs, and school fees. Yet the arrival of money is not the same thing as the return of a person. Telephone calls, time differences, work abroad, and waiting at home create a new life along the river. Even where a passport carries a permanent address, a family may in fact be divided among several countries.

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Chapter 35 — We All

'We All' replaces a single character's perspective with a collective migrant voice. Labourers, nurses, drivers, service workers, and members of families who have gone away recount their departures, employment, debts, remittances, shared rooms, and difficulty returning. The growing burden of work borne by women, elderly people, children, and people with disabilities who remain in the village also enters the story. Migration brings financial security and education to some households, but also produces distance, absence, and deferred mourning. Finally, 'we all' comes to include those who left, those who stayed, those who returned, and those still waiting.

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Chapter 36 — The Village That Emptied

In 2016 Ramanugrah is asked to retrieve an old family register from a locked house in the eastern settlement. Members of the owning family now live in Surat, Delhi, and Nepal. Utensils, clothes, letters, bank slips, remittances from Muscat, photographs, and a chest bear the marks of several generations' lives. In the private genealogy, he finds the maternal village of a woman who was absent from the main register. Ramanugrah makes copies of the necessary documents, arranges the household's private belongings, and locks the door. That a house is 'empty' does not mean that its entire history has been erased.

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Chapter 37 — Voice Messages Three, Four, and Five

Anuradha's third, fourth, and fifth voice messages from Muscat give a daily account of work and money. She discusses the difference between gross pay and take-home earnings, insurance deductions, loan instalments, money remitted through the bank, and the lives of fellow nurses abroad. Behind each banking message lies a household need for medicine, repayment, or education. She has not forgotten her earlier questions about Phuljhari, but this time she does not press for an immediate reply. The number of messages grows, and the household's silence remains.

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Chapter 38 — The Genealogist's Clients

Over time, the people coming to Ramanugrah for genealogical work change. There are increasing requests involving photographs taken by mobile phone, marriage websites, caste certificates, school family trees, digital payments, and PDF files. Long genealogical chains cannot readily fit into small digital fields, and photographing old papers can itself damage them. Ramanugrah explains the difference between official certificates and traditional lineage records. In the counter-register he records the possibility of 'erosion of meaning' alongside the physical deterioration of paper, while explicitly marking the former as a hypothesis.

Chapter 39 — Kosi — 6

The sixth river voice centres on the growing distance between old genealogical registers, photocopies, official forms, mobile-phone images, and digital files. When an original line of relationships is compressed into a small box, some names or contexts can disappear. Against the erosion of letters by water, the river places the erosion of meaning caused by human selection. Recording sources, dates, question marks, and phrases such as 'not known' emerges as a modest but necessary way of preserving a record. The spellings and locations attached to the names of cross-border families also enter this flow.

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Chapter 40 — Kathmandu and Madhes

In 2015 an envelope arrives from Kathmandu, sent by a family in Saptari connected with an old marriage. Ramanugrah compares citizenship documents, birth registrations, a handwritten genealogy, and an old wedding invitation with the record of the procession stopped at Bhimnagar. Indian and Nepali documents use different fields for names, maternal identification, citizenship, and locality. He verifies the correspondences the evidence permits, but refuses to force uncertain names together. Amid the political and social conditions of Madhes, an old network of kinship and modern state identification can assist one another without either replacing the other.

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Chapter 41 — Returning Home

In 2020 the pandemic restricts Anuradha's hospital shifts and travel in Muscat. She makes preparations to return, negotiates changing flights, medical tests, several administrative checks, and quarantine requirements. Even after reaching India, her journey continues in stages; she finally has to walk part of the way to the village. Ramanugrah and Mohan wait for her at home. Receiving a meal cooked at home is an emotional moment, but Anuradha carefully records the necessary permissions and travel dates in her notebook. Returning has become more than merely covering a distance.

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Chapter 42 — Three Generations in One Room

After the seven days of isolation end, Ramanugrah, Mohan, and Anuradha live together under one roof. Minor disagreements arise about the household's daily arrangements—the kitchen, bathroom, electrical wiring, and health precautions. The three generations have different documents, life experiences, and ways of reaching decisions; a conversation begins between the older rules of genealogical verification and the newer discipline of medical care. Living together does not by itself erase the unspoken questions between generations. At the end Ramanugrah writes all three names in his diary as present in the house. Their closeness is seen through these exact, everyday acts.

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Chapter 43 — Kosi — 7

The seventh Kosi chapter contrasts the river's uninterrupted movement with the locked roads, empty stations, halted trains, returning workers, and lives confined within houses during the pandemic. People create new boundaries around health, touch, countries, districts, and homes; names are entered repeatedly on official lists. Although three generations share a house, old questions remain between grandfather, father, and granddaughter. Like sand shifting unseen beneath the river, hidden contradictions continue to move under a surface of calm.

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Chapter 44 — The Counter-Register

While looking for electrical wiring, Anuradha finds the green-bound counter-register in a bag under a table. Ramanugrah's private investigation and his notes about unidentified or omitted names open before her. She reads the sources, conjectures, questions concerning Phuljhari and Jagesar, and references to other unnamed people; her grandfather explains the limits of what has been written there. Unspoken family history now enters the reading of another generation. Ramanugrah records in his diary that Anuradha came upon the counter-register and read from it aloud. The book is no longer shut away in a secret bag.

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Chapter 45 — Those Who Survived

Anuradha asks for the source of the possible family branch descending from Phuljhari in the counter-register. Using papers dating from after the 1934 flood, Ramanugrah, Mohan, and Anuradha travel eleven kilometres to the south-east, to a Musahar settlement. There Lakshmi Sada shows them her family's private documents. Sugni's marriage record gives her mother's name as Phuljhari; the sequence continues through Sugni's son Bindeshwar to Bindeshwar's daughter Lakshmi. This establishes a living branch, but Jagesar Sada's paternity remains unproved. Lakshmi keeps the original documents at home. The family acknowledges the history of erasure, while the work of writing the name again is deferred until the next day.

Chapter 46 — Writing the Name

In an exceptionally brief chapter written in an archival style, Ramanugrah makes a new entry for the erased family branch. He records Phuljhari as the daughter of Shridhar Mishra, her disputed domestic relationship with Jagesar Sada, her name as Sugni's mother, the succession from Sugni through Bindeshwar to Lakshmi, and the location of the surviving Musahar settlement. Jagesar's paternity is still described as uncertain; the disputed marriage is not declared conclusively established. In the final line, Phuljhari's name is entered again in the main genealogical line.

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Chapter 47 — Death and the Manuscript

In the rainy season of 2024, the elderly Ramanugrah's sight and body are growing weak. He arranges the original register, the counter-register, and the restored page naming Phuljhari, and tells Anuradha where to find the key to the chest. Ramanugrah later dies. His family and other genealogists consider temporary arrangements for safeguarding the manuscripts, preparing an inventory, and regulating access. Anuradha does not claim to become a genealogical registrar herself; her concern is preservation and transparent arrangements. A new prospective marriage client arrives to ask to inspect the register, but the chest is not immediately opened. Ramanugrah is gone; the manuscript remains.

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Chapter 48 — Kosi — 8

In the final chapter, the Kosi's voice places the earthquake and flood of 1934, the Kusaha breach of 2008, and the year 2024 together in layers of earth, silt, and abandoned channels. From the river's perspective, embankments, houses, names, bones, genealogical registers, and chests are all subject to change. Restoring Phuljhari's name is a significant correction of a historical erasure, but does not automatically undo earlier violence or the instability of geography. Ramanugrah's hand has stopped; the key has passed into another hand; and the river continues to flow. The novel closes with the ongoing movement of life, records, and water.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Narrative

05 · Jal-Panji (The Water Register)

Overall Narrative

Beginning in the present of the 2008 Kosi flood, the novel moves through the earthquake of 1934 and Phuljhari's erased genealogical line, the treaty and embankments of 1954, domestic history in the 1960s, later migration, the return of 2020, and the inheritance of records in 2024. Ramanugrah's diary, oral witnesses, old genealogical registers, modern government papers, Anuradha's voice messages, and the Kosi speaking in the first person each give the narrative a different vantage point. Its central questions are who has the right to write down a name, what evidence survives after a name is erased, and what responsibility belongs to the person who records a truth that remains incomplete.

WORK / कृति

06 · Bijji: Among the Crocodiles

418 original episodes · 42 editorial synopsis groups

SECTION / खण्ड

How the Text Is Divided

06 · Bijji: Among the Crocodiles

How the Text Is Divided

The original manuscript has no numbered chapters or chapter titles. Its 418 narrative episodes are separated by the symbol ❖. For the convenience of readers, the sequence has been preserved here and approximately ten episodes have been brought together in each synopsis group; the last group covers eight episodes. The forty-two headings are editorial aids, not chapter headings belonging to the original book.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Story Synopsis

06 · Bijji: Among the Crocodiles

Overall Story Synopsis

The rescue of the child Ishan from a venomous cobra by a mongoose in the family home at Garh Narikel establishes a symbol that recurs throughout the narrative. Ishan's father, Satyaprakash Karna, resists an extortion network surrounding public construction tenders and dies in a suspicious road collision. The efforts of his wife Mrinalini, Superintendent of Police Aniruddha Chaudhary, accounts officer Mayank Jha and, later, cyber-investigation officer Rachna Sinha uncover several layers of financial conspiracy. The contracting network connects with digital games, online gambling, mule accounts, money laundering and investment institutions. The courts examine each defendant's acts and culpability separately; the old death is not

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Overall Story Synopsis

wholly explained, although a limited but significant measure of justice is achieved. In the closing movement, grief, appeals, rehabilitation, policy reform, research, remembrance and Ishan's writing carry the story into a new generation. The mongoose's watch does not signify that crime has finally ended. It signifies the continuity of vigilance.

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Synopsis Group 01 — The Mongoose's Watch and the Invisible Price of a Contract (Episodes 1–10)

Overall Story Synopsis

At Dhaneshwari's home in Garh Narikel, a mongoose saves the child Ishan from a cobra that has entered the house. Eight years later, Satyaprakash Karna wins a government tender for embankment construction. He is pressured to hand over six per cent of the contract amount; when he refuses, obstacles begin to arise in the supply of materials, transport and inspections. Satyaprakash records the times and particulars of the threats in a black diary. Accounts officer Mayank Jha notices suspicious payments to 'Pravahi Consultancy'. Soon Satyaprakash and his driver Raghunath die in a collision with a truck. His wife Mrinalini refuses to accept the event as an accident. Superintendent of Police Aniruddha Chaudhary begins an impartial

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Synopsis Group 01 — The Mongoose's Watch and the Invisible Price of a Contract (Episodes 1–10)

Overall Story Synopsis

investigation, while the diary recording the threats disappears. The mongoose becomes a symbol of the family's alertness and steadfast resistance.

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Synopsis Group 02 — Suspicion, Preliminary Evidence and the First Risk to an Innocent Person (Episodes 11–20)

Overall Story Synopsis

Toll-plaza footage, details of the truck, Mrinalini's testimony and Mayank's financial indications form the basis of Aniruddha's inquiry. A burnt vehicle is discovered in an abandoned warehouse, but the investigators proceed cautiously in identifying it. Kaushal Mahto states that he was the truck's former owner and had sold it through Kanhaiya Rajak. Mayank points to possible consultancy fees connected with Digant and amounts matching the six-per-cent demand. At home, Ishan struggles with grief and asks Dhaneshwari about the difference between revenge and justice. The burnt vehicle proves not to be the truck involved in the collision, forcing the investigation to change direction. Then a fire breaks out at the yard of another

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Synopsis Group 02 — Suspicion, Preliminary Evidence and the First Risk to an Innocent Person (Episodes 11–20)

Overall Story Synopsis

contractor, Shivkumar Mandal, and worker Mohan Paswan dies. The inquiry expands beyond a single contractor's death to a coordinated system for suppressing competition.

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Synopsis Group 03 — An Organisation Orderly on Paper, and the Connections Within (Episodes 21–30)

Overall Story Synopsis

The office of 'Loksetu Public Relations Service' and the papers supplied by Malati Ghosh initially appear to be in order, but discrepancies emerge between the dates of events and the actual circumstances. Auditor Naina Verma joins the combined investigation. Through an outside accountant shared by Pravahi Consultancy and Loksetu, a reference to someone called 'Pranav Babu' is found. Several people bear similar names, and no one is declared guilty without confirmation. Suspicions concerning the Digant group and Devanshu Rakshit deepen. The possibility that Mayank is being followed increases his family's fear. Mohan Paswan's widow Sarojini asks what will happen to her children's future and the cost of their education. The evidence

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Synopsis Group 03 — An Organisation Orderly on Paper, and the Connections Within (Episodes 21–30)

Overall Story Synopsis

of financial crime is placed beside the real losses suffered in the lives of its victims.

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Synopsis Group 04 — Pranavesh's Statement and the Digant Network (Episodes 31–40)

Overall Story Synopsis

Pranavesh comes before the investigators voluntarily and describes the arrangement of transactions among the Digant group, a consultancy firm and a local public-relations agency. His account exposes internal methods of securing tender withdrawals, applying pressure and arranging payments, although responsibility for direct violence remains uncertain. The investigators seek independent corroboration for each part of his statement. Digant's records are requisitioned, and concerns for Pranavesh's safety grow. When Kanhaiya Rajak's name leaks to the press, his business and negotiations over his daughter's marriage suffer. He reminds the police that safeguarding the reputation of an innocent person is itself an investigative

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Synopsis Group 04 — Pranavesh's Statement and the Digant Network (Episodes 31–40)

Overall Story Synopsis

responsibility. Gradually, several layers of connections become visible within the organisation's influential outward facade.

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Synopsis Group 05 — The Adjustment List and Devanshu's Arrest (Episodes 41–50)

Overall Story Synopsis

Records from the Janvishwas Cooperative Society, the position of Jitendra Pal and the 'adjustment list' described by Pranavesh enter the inquiry. The list classifies contractors according to the pressure that can be applied to them; notes against Satyaprakash's name include words such as 'hard' and 'separate measures'. Yet these words do not constitute conclusive proof of an order to kill. Satyaprakash's call records are examined again. Vihan Sarang, founder of a gaming and media company named Ambar, is introduced. Devanshu Rakshit of Digant is arrested on charges of financial irregularities and extortion, but the question of Satyaprakash's death remains unanswered. Both the media and the family want immediate conclusions, while

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Synopsis Group 05 — The Adjustment List and Devanshu's Arrest (Episodes 41–50)

Overall Story Synopsis

the investigation's essential discipline is to remain within the limits of the evidence.

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Synopsis Group 06 — The First Trial, Limited Justice and a New Generation (Episodes 51–60)

Overall Story Synopsis

Devanshu stands trial for financial offences and is convicted on those charges. The question of Satyaprakash's alleged murder, however, is not immediately resolved. Efforts are made to clear Kanhaiya Rajak's name formally. Mohan Paswan's family receives compensation, but Sarojini's everyday insecurity does not disappear. Time passes and Ishan moves towards college. Elsewhere, Ambar develops a game-based digital application and secures investment from 'Uttarayan Digital Holding'. The narrative of the old tender-based network now turns towards a world of digital accounts. Partial justice for a crime of the past leaves questions unresolved within the family.

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Synopsis Group 07 — Ambar's Digital Expansion and the Dilemma of Accounts (Episodes 61–70)

Overall Story Synopsis

As Dhaneshwari grows old in the village, Ishan enters the professional world of data analysis. While examining Ambar's gaming systems, advertising payments and financial flows, he notices several unusual relationships among accounts. Under financial pressure, student Abhishek Jha is drawn, through Ritesh, into a scheme in which he lends his account for transactions. The boundary between the institution's official systems and an external network of mule accounts is unclear. Ishan's preliminary report raises uncomfortable questions, but not every abnormal flow proves a crime. Abhishek's account is frozen, imperilling the money needed for his sister Manjari's education and admission. Digital financial crime becomes an obstacle to an

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Synopsis Group 07 — Ambar's Digital Expansion and the Dilemma of Accounts (Episodes 61–70)

Overall Story Synopsis

entire family's future.

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Synopsis Group 08 — The Beginning of the Cyber Investigation and the Night Room (Episodes 71–80)

Overall Story Synopsis

When Manjari loses her opportunity for admission, guilt and fear weigh ever more heavily on Abhishek. At the cyber police station he explains his role to Inspector Rachna Sinha. Rather than instantly treating him as a perpetrator of the entire conspiracy, Rachna investigates who actually controlled the account and how much Abhishek knew. Other complaints, Ambar's advertising patterns and leads associated with the 'Night Room' are collected. Ishan compares digital data with old Digant documents, without treating historical resemblance as independent evidence of a present offence. The investigation turns towards a photograph of Manoj Nayak and possible connections. Abhishek's cooperation does not immediately resolve his problems

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Synopsis Group 08 — The Beginning of the Cyber Investigation and the Night Room (Episodes 71–80)

Overall Story Synopsis

with the bank, his family or society.

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Synopsis Group 09 — The Gambling Den, Uttarayan and an Institutional Crisis (Episodes 81–90)

Overall Story Synopsis

Following Manoj Nayak, the police reach one physical centre of operations behind the online gambling network. A raid, seized computers and account examinations bring the name 'Uttarayan' to light. Manoj is apprehended. Ishan's analytical report reaches Ambar's board of directors, intensifying disagreement over the institution's internal accountability. Ishan consults Aniruddha, while Mrinalini worries about his safety. The state's economic offences branch adds possible money laundering to the inquiry, and Vihan Sarang faces formal questions. Although there is a temptation to connect everything with the earlier case, the investigators must ask what the new transactions prove in themselves, and what is merely the recurrence of an

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Synopsis Group 09 — The Gambling Den, Uttarayan and an Institutional Crisis (Episodes 81–90)

Overall Story Synopsis

old name.

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Synopsis Group 10 — Different Agencies and the Question of Seven Accounts (Episodes 91–100)

Overall Story Synopsis

Vihan's detailed statement makes an inter-agency investigation necessary. In Delhi, different agencies define their jurisdictions and the limits of the evidence available to them. Among seven suspicious accounts are some belonging to small businesses and one held in the name of a deceased young man. Records connected with Pawan's family, Neelkanth Aggregates and Pradeep Mahajan are examined. The name 'Sahastr TradeLink' points to yet another layer of finance. The NIA decides to keep its role limited: not every unusual digital activity should automatically be classified as a national-security crime. In this complicated inquiry, defining the proper limits of different legal routes becomes an important event in itself.

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Synopsis Group 11 — Keshav's Name, Dhaneshwari's Death and the Old Mansion (Episodes 101–110)

Overall Story Synopsis

Keshav Mehta's conduct at Ambar changes, and the board sends him on leave. Ishan withdraws from his professional duties with Ambar. Meanwhile, Dhaneshwari's health deteriorates and she eventually dies. The old image of the mongoose takes on a new significance for the family. The lawful transfer of digital records and Keshav's statement suggest a living connection between the old construction racket and the new financial network. The search for Pradeep Mahajan intensifies. Information about an 'old mansion across the river' takes the investigation to Birju Sah. For Ishan, his grandmother's death is not simply a private bereavement: he has lost an early source of the family's tradition of vigilance and justice.

Synopsis Group 12 — From Birju Sah to Chandra (Episodes 111–120)

Overall Story Synopsis

1 / 2

Birju Sah's old mansion becomes a focus of investigation. Birju admits to his former work as a middleman, but fragments of names and incomplete statements cannot immediately be turned into conclusions. His illness and death deprive the investigation of an important possible witness. A reference to 'Chandra' emerges from papers held by his son. The search for documents relating to an old trust and an associated organisation leads to Shashank Devvrat. Aniruddha and Rachna attempt to understand how the earlier financial arrangement may have acquired successors. Death, memory and absent documents make the reconstruction of decades-old relationships difficult. Ishan's responsibility extends beyond technical analysis to a restrained

Synopsis Group 12 — From Birju Sah to Chandra (Episodes 111–120)

Overall Story Synopsis

use of historical evidence.

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Synopsis Group 13 — Pradeep Mahajan's Surrender and the Family's Punishment (Episodes 121–130)

Overall Story Synopsis

Amid investigative meetings with Shashank Devvrat, Ishan receives new professional responsibilities. Financial data reveal connections among older accounts. Pradeep Mahajan presents himself voluntarily, and judicial proceedings begin in relation to his role. Inside prison, his days become bound to the dates of legal hearings. Separation from his wife and daughter Trisha becomes a personal consequence of his offence. His statement before a magistrate provides information about documentary support and layers of accounts. The crisis deepens at Ambar's head office, while an investigation of the Uttarayan fund uncovers further financial complications. Pradeep's partial cooperation does not absolve him of the moral consequences of his

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Synopsis Group 13 — Pradeep Mahajan's Surrender and the Family's Punishment (Episodes 121–130)

Overall Story Synopsis

actions.

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Synopsis Group 14 — Aditi's Documents, Old Papers and Doubt (Episodes 131–140)

Overall Story Synopsis

A search for earlier connections of the Samriddhi Rural Finance Board leads to the family of Shashibhushan Lal and his daughter Aditi. She shares her recollections and the papers available to her, but the investigators insist on independently corroborating the information. The arrival of Pradeep's daughter Trisha raises painful questions about the relationship between father and daughter. Rain begins along the Kamala-Balan, while the obscurity surrounding earlier events and the present inquiry advance together. Records of a twenty-year-old gaming-promotion project are retrieved. Kripanand Verma's diary offers a few letters and possibilities, but Rachna resists the temptation to turn incomplete initials into names of her own

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Synopsis Group 14 — Aditi's Documents, Old Papers and Doubt (Episodes 131–140)

choosing.

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Synopsis Group 15 — Fresh Evidence from the Old Collision and Keshav's Arrest (Episodes 141–150)

Overall Story Synopsis

Having served an earlier sentence, Devanshu Rakshit again enters the investigation. The file on Haricharan Mandal, Mrinalini's statement and the old circumstances surrounding Satyaprakash's death are reassessed. In the present gambling case, Keshav Mehta's home and office are lawfully searched; he is arrested and placed in judicial custody. In prison, Pradeep meets another inmate, bringing into view the complex possibilities of change after a crime. Ambar's director Vihan Sarang hands over the institution's stored electronic correspondence to investigators. Those records point towards Nalin Barua and strengthen the possibility of connecting present financial wrongdoing with events of the past through documentary evidence.

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Synopsis Group 16 — The Investigation into Satyaprakash's Death Is Reopened (Episodes 151–160)

Overall Story Synopsis

Nalin Barua's statement and materials found in Aditi's old trunk are considered. Rachna Sinha recommends the formal reopening of the investigation into Satyaprakash Karna's death. For Ishan's family, this offers hope while reopening old wounds. Keshav's arrest does not shut down the online gambling network, for its arrangements are larger than any single individual. Mrinalini reconsiders what it means to remain among her home and memories. Rachna keeps every evidentiary strand separate: old records, present-day money, individual statements and physical evidence. The story now moves far beyond Digant's first trial, giving a new procedural life to an unresolved injustice from twenty years earlier.

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Synopsis Group 17 — Re-examining the Collision Site and the Clue to Udaynath (Episodes 161–170)

Overall Story Synopsis

As media attention surrounds the reopened inquiry, Rachna visits the original collision site. Investigators try to obtain Basudev Marik's memories of the old vehicle, transport permits and documents relating to the driver. The existence of several people named Kaushal complicates identification. In the current gambling case, inquiries continue into the connections between Manoj Nayak, Ritesh Das and Raghuvir Tanti. A figure called 'Uday Babu' may be connected with the financial structure, but independent confirmation of the claim is still lacking. Shailesh Mandal and others are trapped by gambling debts, fear and social shame. Udaynath Mishra appears before investigators, who examine the gap between his public role and what he

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Synopsis Group 17 — Re-examining the Collision Site and the Clue to Udaynath (Episodes 161–170)

Overall Story Synopsis

actually knew.

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Synopsis Group 18 — The Financial Investigation Reaches Saurabh Bardhan (Episodes 171–180)

Overall Story Synopsis

Udaynath Mishra's financial dealings, alternative explanations for the old death and Manoj's telephone records are investigated separately. Raghuvir Tanti is caught. Statements by Keshav, Manoj and Raghuvir bring forward the name of Saurabh Bardhan. Rachna examines the real scope of Saurabh's documents and official position so that his influential name alone will not determine culpability. Saurabh attends questioning, but the first interview proves inconclusive. Lawfully obtained emails and meeting papers clarify some financial links. Back in Garh Narikel, Mrinalini holds an old pair of spectacles and feels the distance, measured in memory, between her husband and the struggle of the present.

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Synopsis Group 19 — Arrest, Investment and the Last Fragment of Old Testimony (Episodes 181–190)

Overall Story Synopsis

Udaynath is not immediately arrested, while Saurabh Bardhan's possible investment-support network undergoes detailed scrutiny. Pradeep's prison life and a visit from his daughter Trisha reveal the family's losses and his guilt. Papers show that suspicious funds need not enter personal accounts directly: layers of business channels and supporting loans can conceal their source. Backup records held by Alok Bhasin, Rajat Chaubey's warehouse ledger, Basudev's recollections of the vehicle and old information from Ramavatar Yadav all enter the inquiry. Saurabh is arrested and placed in judicial custody. Ishan releases a public report on digital risks, but the old dispute over the death remains unresolved.

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Synopsis Group 20 — The 'S.K. Case' and the Flood Emergency (Episodes 191–200)

Overall Story Synopsis

A reference to the 'S.K. case' in Saurabh's records becomes a possible link to the old investigation into Satyaprakash's death. Rachna makes clear that finding an old name does not itself prove murder. Meanwhile, the Kamala-Balan rises in flood. The school at Garh Narikel becomes a relief camp, and saving lives becomes the first priority for local people, including Ishan and Mrinalini. Records of insurance on the old vehicle provide a new lead. Rachna decides to question Devanshu Rakshit again, and the reliability of his new statement is assessed separately. Manoj's arrest in the gambling network and Saurabh's bail proceedings continue. The search for truth about an old crime and the present natural disaster do not cancel one

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Synopsis Group 20 — The 'S.K. Case' and the Flood Emergency (Episodes 191–200)

Overall Story Synopsis

another; together they widen the narrative.

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Synopsis Group 21 — The Interim Report and Preparation for Prosecution (Episodes 201–210)

Overall Story Synopsis

After the flood recedes, Ishan finds an old, water-soaked notebook at home. Rachna prepares an interim report on the investigation into Satyaprakash's death, clearly distinguishing established facts, inferable connections and remaining uncertainty. Mrinalini reads the public summary and recognises that even partial clarity differs from years of silence. The charge sheet in the new gambling case is prepared, with efforts to distinguish defendants from witnesses, account holders and assisting individuals. The list of financial losses, disrupted families and social stigma extends beyond the formal legal record. Preparations are made to bring the case before a special court, beginning the stage of judicial examination.

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Synopsis Group 22 — The Examination of Accounts and Witnesses in the Special Court (Episodes 211–220)

Overall Story Synopsis

Before the special court, the prosecution presents flows through digital accounts, suspicious activities and the roles of the organisers. The statements of a bank compliance officer, Sabina Khatoon, Abhishek Jha, Ritesh Das, Raghuvir Tanti and Pradeep Mahajan are examined one by one. The prosecution's overall account is kept distinct from each witness's personal knowledge. Accounts belonging to people such as Sabina and Abhishek were used, but that fact does not establish the same criminal intention in each of them. Ritesh is cross-examined about recruitment, pressure and financial benefit. Pradeep acknowledges his documentary role while confronting questions about the limits of his knowledge and his personal remorse. Before

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Synopsis Group 22 — The Examination of Accounts and Witnesses in the Special Court (Episodes 211–220)

Overall Story Synopsis

2 / 2

assessing the evidence together, the court tests each link separately.

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Synopsis Group 23 — A Shared Financial System, Different Responsibilities (Episodes 221–230)

Overall Story Synopsis

The court distinguishes Keshav Mehta's accounting role, Saurabh's investment support and Udaynath Mishra's possible ethical negligence. Udaynath is not yet an accused person; the court determines the permissible use of his testimony and other evidence. Outside, the media and public try to recast the trial as a simple story of heroes and villains. In Garh Narikel, Mrinalini has the flood marks covered with fresh limewash, but preserves one trace of the past. Judicial consideration of separate charges also begins in the Satyaprakash case. An electronic-evidence expert and Mayank Jha testify about financial links. Shailesh's family and Ritesh's difficult rehabilitation show that life continues outside the courtroom.

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Synopsis Group 24 — Final Arguments and Different Degrees of Conviction (Episodes 231–240)

Overall Story Synopsis 1 / 2

The proceedings in the special court last for months. The defence teams for Manoj, Raghuvir, Keshav, Pradeep and Saurabh argue separately about the elements of each offence, intention and the reliability of evidence. Proceedings concerning the old Satyaprakash case run in parallel. Raghuvir's associates discuss admitting limited offences; Keshav defends his accounting decisions as merely technical work; and Saurabh's defence distinguishes his position as an investor from direct operation of gambling. On judgment day the court reaches different outcomes on different charges. Some allegations are proved against Manoj, Keshav, Pradeep and Saurabh, but not every claim of an overarching conspiracy is established. Sabina and Abhishek

Synopsis Group 24 — Final Arguments and Different Degrees of Conviction (Episodes 231–240)

Overall Story Synopsis

are treated differently. Justice is not reduced to a single collective proclamation.

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Synopsis Group 25 — Even after Sentencing, the Question of Satyaprakash Remains (Episodes 241–250)

Overall Story Synopsis

News headlines about the gambling judgment flatten the distinctions carefully drawn by the court. At sentencing, consideration is given to Pradeep's cooperation and remorse, Manoj's role, Keshav's responsibility and the specific extent of Saurabh's knowledge. Ishan and Mrinalini recognise that this judgment does not, by itself, resolve how Satyaprakash died. In the old case, final arguments address the chain of circumstantial evidence against Devanshu. The prosecution connects unlawful pressure, Haricharan's violent role, use of a vehicle and the time of death; the defence identifies remaining doubts in every link. The court must draw a decisive line between a possibility and proof beyond reasonable doubt.

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Synopsis Group 26 — A Judgment with Half an Answer, and Distance from Revenge (Episodes 251–260)

Overall Story Synopsis

In the case of Satyaprakash Karna's death, the court finds the old conclusion of an 'ordinary road accident' unconvincing. Taking account of Haricharan's violent campaign of pressure, a possible vehicle connection and evidence that Devanshu initiated unlawful coercion, it convicts Devanshu of a limited responsibility for a dangerous illegal conspiracy. But neither a specific instruction to cause a killing nor an intention to bring about the death is proved beyond reasonable doubt; the full charge on that ground is not sustained. Mrinalini accepts the partial truth now recognised by the state without making a public spectacle of either forgiveness or revenge. By the river, Ishan reflects that knowing the result of justice and

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Synopsis Group 26 — A Judgment with Half an Answer, and Distance from Revenge (Episodes 251–260)

Overall Story Synopsis

protecting the living are two different responsibilities. Rachna again emphasises the lasting value of disciplined investigative method.

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Synopsis Group 27 — Turning Justice into Life after the Verdict (Episodes 261–270)

Overall Story Synopsis

Ishan adds practical recommendations to his report on the risks of mule accounts. Mrinalini preserves Dhaneshwari's old notebook. Even after the criminal trial, questions remain about digital risks, victims' difficulties and institutional reform. Saurabh and Devanshu appeal. Trisha slowly begins speaking with her father Pradeep again. Under pressure to reform, Ambar continues its operations, while Rachna is transferred to a new post. Ishan's training work and the social rehabilitation of Sabina, Abhishek, Shailesh and Ritesh advance at different rates. The narrative's focus shifts from the court's order to the everyday lives of people affected by it.

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Synopsis Group 28 — Aniruddha's Final Lesson and the Banking Guidelines (Episodes 271–280)

Overall Story Synopsis

Ishan's project enters university training programmes. Sabina resumes her business, Manjari moves ahead in nursing education, Shailesh returns towards teaching and Ritesh gradually develops his mobile-phone repair work. Devanshu appeals, but Mrinalini accepts that counting the years of his sentence will not bring back her dead husband. Former Superintendent Aniruddha Chaudhary falls ill. Before his death, he tells Ishan that the right method matters more than a seemingly perfect conclusion. His death marks the end of a generation for the family and the investigation. Later, the state issues new guidelines distinguishing knowing participants in mule-account schemes, those who join for profit despite warnings, and people deceived

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Synopsis Group 28 — Aniruddha's Final Lesson and the Banking Guidelines (Episodes 271–280)

Overall Story Synopsis

or acting in ignorance. A partial institutional reform becomes a concrete answer.

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Synopsis Group 29 — Public Remembrance and Private Grief at Home (Episodes 281–290)

Overall Story Synopsis

Satyaprakash's objection is entered under his proper name in the public financial record. A researcher asks permission to use it, and Mrinalini distinguishes public truth from the family's private pain. New embankment work begins beside the Kamala-Balan. Ishan sees the river, the village, the old house and the mongoose's symbolism in a new light. In her new office, Rachna teaches investigators the difference between evidence and inference. The family's story is no longer confined to an inquiry into one man's death; it becomes a public question about rights, transparency and remembrance. Public discussion gradually moves away from the sentences handed down, but their consequences continue in the private lives of those affected.

Synopsis Group 30 — The Time of Appeals and a New Language within the Family (Episodes 291–300)

Overall Story Synopsis

Saurabh's and Keshav's appeals proceed independently in the High Court. Findings on several serious financial offences against Keshav stand. Reading literature on rehabilitation in prison, he begins to recognise the human suffering concealed behind monetary sums. Pradeep completes the remainder of his term and is released, but rebuilding trust at home is now his task. His daughter Trisha studies law and relates questions of guilt, intention and punishment to her own experience. Mrinalini encourages Ishan to write the story, without imposing a sentimental conclusion. Rachna continues teaching the need for caution rather than opaque or overconfident judgments. Review of the banking guidelines proceeds.

Synopsis Group 31 — The Dhaneshwari Memorial Book Fund and the Beginning of Writing (Episodes 301–310)

Overall Story Synopsis

Events such as Shailesh's departmental case, medical assistance for Sabina's daughter, Abhishek's awareness campaign and the restructuring of the Uttarayan fund reveal a new post-crime condition of society. Mrinalini establishes a school book fund in Dhaneshwari's name. Vaidehi Jha visits the village with a research interest in the long-term social effects of judicial uncertainty. Beside the river, among the family's notebook and memories of his grandmother, Ishan begins to write his story with Aniruddha's old pen. The outward events of the criminal investigation are now becoming the material of a novel filled not merely with autobiography but with public questions.

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Synopsis Group 32 — The Manuscript, Research and the Wider Life of Rehabilitation (Episodes 311–320)

Overall Story Synopsis

The pages of Ishan's manuscript accumulate. Vaidehi Jha connects prolonged judicial uncertainty with lived social experience in her research. In a new investigation, Rachna examines a smaller fraud network to the extent warranted by the evidence; every resemblance is not made into a vast conspiracy. The school book fund, Pradeep's financial-literacy classes and Ritesh's experience in business show practical forms of social repair. Manoj's appeal succeeds in part without declaring him entirely innocent. Saurabh requests the files for his appeal. As he writes, Ishan wrestles with how much of a guilty person's private life should be represented. Younger women such as Trisha and Vaidehi become new voices of legal and social

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Synopsis Group 32 — The Manuscript, Research and the Wider Life of Rehabilitation (Episodes 311–320)

Overall Story Synopsis

understanding.

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Synopsis Group 33 — The Mongoose Family, a Real Crocodile and the Limits of Metaphor (Episodes 321–330)

Overall Story Synopsis

A new family of mongooses is seen in the courtyard at Garh Narikel. After a real crocodile is also sighted on the bank of the Kamala-Balan, Ishan understands that metaphor and living creatures must not be treated as identical. Mrinalini is growing older and struggling with small possessions and memories in the house. Ishan lets friends read his manuscript and receives responses to its language. Studying law, Trisha considers the public effects of expression. In an investigation, Rachna prevents an unnecessary arrest and explains the negative achievement of judicial caution: an injustice that did not occur. The Dhaneshwari Memorial Book Fund completes its first year. A small institutional tradition becomes a means of passing

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Synopsis Group 33 — The Mongoose Family, a Real Crocodile and the Limits of Metaphor (Episodes 321–330)

Overall Story Synopsis

vigilance onwards.

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Synopsis Group 34 — Ambar's Self-Examination and the Human Ground of Writing (Episodes 331–340)

Overall Story Synopsis

Vihan Sarang invites Ishan to a public seminar held by Ambar. Rather than naming individuals, Ishan emphasises risk, responsibility and institutional awareness. The need to make room for uncomfortable questions within Ambar is acknowledged. Saurabh's appeal in a higher court succeeds in part, but the main finding concerning financial assistance remains. Keshav begins writing in prison. Ritesh, Shailesh and Manjari draw on their experiences to warn others against financial fraud. Ishan understands the limits of representing the suffering of many characters in one manuscript; he does not wish to turn people into mere examples of crime. Even the easing of Mrinalini's fear on one particular night becomes an important kind of progress

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Synopsis Group 34 — Ambar's Self-Examination and the Human Ground of Writing (Episodes 331–340)

Overall Story Synopsis

in the story.

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Synopsis Group 35 — A New Language of Risk and Small Evidence of Reform (Episodes 341–350)

Overall Story Synopsis

Ishan's manuscript and everyday life at home proceed alongside one another. A banking association reports new kinds of financial risk, and Rachna encounters a similar case. Ishan prepares training materials on that basis. Fraud, misuse of accounts and the language of warnings change with time, so simply repeating old rules is not enough. Trisha writes an article on law, and Sabina illustrates the importance of warnings from her business experience. At Shailesh's school, a pupil is caught in a game resembling gambling; instead of branding the child a criminal, the school considers an opportunity for reform. Ritesh's business stabilises. Rehabilitation appears in these episodes not as a dramatic event but as a series of small,

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Synopsis Group 35 — A New Language of Risk and Small Evidence of Reform (Episodes 341–350)

Overall Story Synopsis

conscious decisions.

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Synopsis Group 36 — Institutional Gaps and an Ageing Mrinalini (Episodes 351–360)

Overall Story Synopsis

Vihan creates a training room at Ambar where incomplete questions can remain questions. Saurabh completes his sentence and is released, but his role in public life remains limited. Mrinalini is ageing, with Dhaneshwari's notebook beside her pillow. Vaidehi brings the final copy of her dissertation. Rachna prepares a training handbook. Ishan's manuscript has grown into a full-length novel, yet he does not feel it is finished. The water of the Kamala-Balan, the village and the family's daily routines live on after the crime narrative. As Mrinalini's health becomes a matter of concern, Ishan slows his writing and turns towards caring for her at home.

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Synopsis Group 37 — The Mother's Illness and the Son's First Duty (Episodes 361–370)

Overall Story Synopsis

With Dhaneshwari's notebook by her pillow, Mrinalini reflects on her relationships in the time remaining to her. Ishan slows his writing; his mother tells him that his first duty is to remain her son. The notebook's eighth line, a small unsigned slip and precepts of caution pass between generations. Rachna discusses the social consequences of fear in her training. Trisha becomes a bearer of shared legal understanding beyond the limits of her family. When Mrinalini's breathing grows difficult, hospital care begins. Her condition stabilises for a time, yet the limits of old age remain clear. Ishan comes to feel that not every event should be turned into a story or a theory: there are moments when simply being present is necessary.

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Synopsis Group 38 — Mrinalini's Last Hours and the Silence of Grief (Episodes 371–380)

Overall Story Synopsis

Rachna considers the wording of an unsigned page as Ishan rereads the last third of his manuscript. Mrinalini's health suddenly deteriorates severely. The decision about hospital care takes account of medical realities, her wishes and the family's concerns. Before dawn, Mrinalini dies peacefully, without a revelation or a dramatic final speech. Ishan holds her hand and, in that moment, remains a son rather than becoming a writer. After the funeral and the first period of mourning, the empty veranda acquires a new meaning. Dhaneshwari's notebook, Rachna's letter and Trisha's presence keep Ishan from being entirely alone, yet representing his suffering once again becomes difficult.

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Synopsis Group 39 — The Shared Watch of the Notebook and Institutions after Grief (Episodes 381–390)

Overall Story Synopsis

Ishan slowly opens his manuscript again. After Mrinalini's death, his experience of seasons and time changes. A proposal is considered to preserve Dhaneshwari's notebook in the school library, but the limits of turning a family possession into an exhibit are debated. Trisha completes her law studies and becomes an advocate; her father's former offence no longer constitutes her entire relationship with him. From a senior position, Rachna transmits investigative methods through training. Ambar's training room continues to make space for difficult questions. Keshav completes his sentence and is released. Through these developments, vigilance is becoming not merely a personal quality of one family or officer, but a practice

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Synopsis Group 39 — The Shared Watch of the Notebook and Institutions after Grief (Episodes 381–390)

distributed across education, business and institutions.

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Synopsis Group 40 — A New Public Life, Research and the Question of an Ending (Episodes 391–400)

Overall Story Synopsis

Saurabh maintains a cautious distance from public prominence. In Pradeep's home, Trisha gives new form to Dhaneshwari's precepts. Through Shailesh's pupils, Sabina's shop and Vaidehi's published research, the experience of an old tragedy becomes an unnamed warning and a kind of social knowledge. Writing the final section of his novel, Ishan reflects that a court judgment is not sufficient reason to end a story. Dhaneshwari's notebook, Aniruddha's pen and Mrinalini's spectacles lie together before him on a table. Rachna retires, but the habit of training and asking the right questions survives. At last, Ishan resists the temptation to impose unnecessary interviews, complete verdicts and a final line for every character.

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Synopsis Group 41 — The Final Direction of the Writing and the Right to Remain Open (Episodes 401–410)

Overall Story Synopsis

A new paved path runs along the Kamala-Balan, but the river's creatures, village life and memory have not become completely fixed. Ishan writes the last page of his novel. Conversations with Rachna and Trisha make him reconsider language, narrative pace and the proper acknowledgement of uncertainty in justice. Ambar's training room carries forward the practice of asking questions; Keshav and Saurabh live within their respective limitations in public life. Having the old house repaired, Ishan realises that even work upon a home is never finally 'finished' in an absolute sense. Just as criminal networks took many forms, the practice of vigilance must also be renewed with each generation and circumstance.

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Synopsis Group 42 — The Unfinished Watch among the Mongoose, Cobra and Crocodile (Episodes 411–418)

Overall Story Synopsis

Ishan makes the final revisions to his manuscript, with Trisha offering suggestions about the pace and language of its ending. Going to the riverside at night, he recalls his family's long history while contemplating the actual existence of the cobra, crocodile and mongoose. He returns home and writes the final page without attempting to solve every question that life presents. Dhaneshwari's unfinished notebook, Aniruddha's pen and Mrinalini's spectacles remain a legacy of vigilance within the home. Children borrow books at the school, while farmers, students and everyday village life continue. In the final scene the cobra is in the grass, the crocodile under the water and the mongoose on the bank. The light grows dim, but the

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Synopsis Group 42 — The Unfinished Watch among the Mongoose, Cobra and Crocodile (Episodes 411–418)

Overall Story Synopsis

watch does not end. The novel has an open ending.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Index of Original Episode Openings

06 · Bijji: Among the Crocodiles

Index of Original Episode Openings

This list preserves brief excerpts from the opening words of the original narrative episodes, enabling readers to identify the corresponding passages in the original manuscript. The quoted fragments are not independent synopses. The synopsis groups appear above.

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Synopsis Group 01 — Original Episodes 1–10

Index of Original Episode Openings

1 / 2

001. It had not rained in Garh Narikel that night, yet the earth was wet. During the day, a slender stream of the Kamala-Balan...

002. Eight years later, Garh Narikel had changed.

003. Work began the following week.

004. In the Public Works Department at Rajdhani Nagar, Assistant Accounts Officer Mayank Jha already knew Satyaprakash...

005. Satyaprakash's fifth call came in the evening, as he was returning home from the embankment site.

006. Two weeks later, Satyaprakash died.

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Synopsis Group 01 — Original Episodes 1–10

Index of Original Episode Openings

in his office that night.

010. At dawn, the mongoose returned to Satyaprakash's courtyard.

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Synopsis Group 02 — Original Episodes 11–20

Index of Original Episode Openings

011. Three objects arrived together on Aniruddha Chaudhary's desk.

012. The abandoned warehouse was on the outskirts of the city, but it was 'abandoned' only on paper.

013. Kaushal Mahto reached the police station by noon.

014. Mayank Jha took the evening bus from Rajdhani Nagar.

015. The crowds of mourners at Satyaprakash's house began to thin.

016. Three days later, the examination of the burnt vehicle delivered its first shock.

017. The pressure really did come

Synopsis Group 02 — Original Episodes 11–20

Index of Original Episode Openings

merely extract money; it controlled competition...

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Synopsis Group 03 — Original Episodes 21–30

Index of Original Episode Openings

021. Loksetu's registered office occupied two rooms above a cultural centre.

022. As they left the office, Mayank said softly, 'A mistake in the date could be a coincidence.'

023. One evening, a motorcycle stopped outside Mrinalini's house.

024. The following week, the government approved a joint investigative arrangement.

025. Naina Verma began her work with the payment records.

026. Within two weeks, the first firm connection was found.

027. The search for 'Pranav Babu' turned up five men named Pranav.

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Synopsis Group 04 — Original Episodes 31–40

Index of Original Episode Openings

031. The meeting reconvened in the room.

032. Pranavesh came to the police on his own.

033. Pranavesh's statement was not written down immediately.

034. At Digant's office, Devanshu Rakshit remained seated until evening.

035. In Garh Narikel that night, Ishan arranged his father's old papers with his own hands for the first time.

036. That night, mist descended over the Kamala-Balan floodplain at Garh Narikel.

037. For his safety, Pranavesh Pathak was lodged outside the city in a government guesthouse

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Synopsis Group 05 — Original Episodes 41–50

Index of Original Episode Openings

041. On paper, the Janvishwas Cooperative Society was almost inactive.

042. Jitendra Pal was extremely weak in his hospital bed.

043. One of the things Pranavesh had said was finally corroborated by independent evidence.

044. Satyaprakash's phone records were reopened.

045. The founder of Ambar was Vihan Sarang.

046. The first legal action against Digant concerned financial irregularities, not murder.

047. The weather was bad on the day Pranavesh was to be brought before the court to give his statement.

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Synopsis Group 05 — Original Episodes 41–50

Index of Original Episode Openings

extortion and manipulation of tenders...

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Synopsis Group 06 — Original Episodes 51–60

Index of Original Episode Openings

051. After Devanshu's arrest, people came to Satyaprakash's house carrying sweets for the first time.

052. The case went to trial.

053. Devanshu was found guilty in the financial case.

054. Kanhaiya Rajak's name was formally cleared.

055. Mohan Paswan's family received compensation.

056. Years passed.

057. In Garh Narikel, Ishan reached the age of going to college.

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Synopsis Group 07 — Original Episodes 61–70

Index of Original Episode Openings

061. On the banks of the Kamala-Balan, Dhaneshwari had grown very old.

062. Ishan's new office was in a glass-fronted commercial building in Rajdhani Nagar.

063. Ambar Interactive was no longer merely an application for sports results.

064. Nothing unusual was found during the first week.

065. Meanwhile, Abhishek Jha had gone three nights in a row without sleep in his hostel room.

066. Nowhere in Ambar's official system did the term 'mule account' appear.

067. Ritesh arranged the first payment into Abhishek's account.

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Synopsis Group 08 — Original Episodes 71–80

Index of Original Episode Openings

071. Manjari lost her admission.

072. At the cyber police station in Rajdhani Nagar, Inspector Rachna Sinha took Abhishek's statement.

073. Rachna did not immediately find any major criminal through Abhishek's phone.

074. Ishan's team found a new piece of data.

075. Mrinalini was now running a small bookshop in Garh Narikel.

076. At the State Cyber Centre, Abhishek's statement was compared with other complaints.

077. Meanwhile, Ambar's 'Night Room' was expanding rapidly.

Synopsis Group 09 — Original Episodes 81–90

Index of Original Episode Openings

081. Following Manoj Nayak, the police reached a place where the real workings of gambling became visible for the first time.

082. News of the raid appeared in the media.

083. The examination of seized computers brought forth a strange name: 'Uttarayan.'

084. Manoj Nayak was finally caught—not while fleeing, but at home.

085. The final version of Ishan's analytical report reached Ambar's board of directors.

086. That night, Ishan called Aniruddha, not his mother, for the first time.

087. That same night in Garh Narikel, as Mrinalini closed her shop, she saw a mongoose near the

Synopsis Group 09 — Original Episodes 81–90

Index of Original Episode Openings

Five minutes after the meeting ended, Rachna Sinha's phone rang.

090. Ishan stood alone on the office roof at night.

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Synopsis Group 10 — Original Episodes 91–100

Index of Original Episode Openings

091. Vihan Sarang's formal statement took four hours the next day.

092. That same evening, the State Economic Offences Wing received information from the central authorities.

093. The inter-agency meeting was held not in Rajdhani Nagar, but in Delhi.

094. Five of the seven accounts were in the names of small businesses.

095. The seventh account belonged to a young man who had died a month earlier.

096. Pawan's mother was drying grain in the courtyard when the team arrived.

097. At first sight, the office of Neelkanth Aggregates confounded all the investigators'

Synopsis Group 10 — Original Episodes 91–100

Index of Original Episode Openings

decided to limit its role.

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Synopsis Group 11 — Original Episodes 101–110

Index of Original Episode Openings

101. Meanwhile, Keshav Mehta was still coming to the Ambar office, but his behaviour had changed.

102. The following morning, Ambar's board of directors sent Keshav Mehta on leave.

103. Ishan was formally removed from Ambar's accounts work.

104. That week, Dhaneshwari's health suddenly deteriorated.

105. After the funeral rites in Garh Narikel, the house fell very quiet.

106. Time had not stood still in Abhishek Jha's household either.

107. A month later, a small digital record from the NIA's separate investigation was legally

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Synopsis Group 11 — Original Episodes 101–110

Index of Original Episode Openings

out not to be a location in Rajdhani Nagar.

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Synopsis Group 12 — Original Episodes 111–120

Index of Original Episode Openings

111. The envelope was not opened there.

112. Aniruddha stayed awake very late that night.

113. After Dhaneshwari's shraddha rites in Garh Narikel, Ishan was preparing to return to Rajdhani Nagar.

114. The following morning, local police were posted to guard Birju Sah's mansion.

115. Birju was a broker from the old days—he admitted this without evasion.

116. That night, Birju Sah suddenly fell ill.

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Synopsis Group 13 — Original Episodes 121–130

Index of Original Episode Openings

121. Shashank Devvrat himself set a time for the meeting.
122. That day, Ishan was formally given a new responsibility.
123. The data told a strange story.
124. Pradeep Mahajan finally came forward of his own accord.
125. The entrance gate of the district jail was smaller than Pradeep had imagined.
126. His wife did not come to the first visit.
127. Pradeep gave his detailed statement before the magistrate slowly, over time.

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Synopsis Group 14 — Original Episodes 131–140

Index of Original Episode Openings

131. The liquidator of the Samriddhi Village Finance Board had died long ago.
132. The search for Shashibhushan Lal's family led to a daughter—
133. But Aditi made one final statement—
134. At night, Ishan called the old house in Garh Narikel.
135. Pradeep's daughter came to his second prison visit.
136. Rain began over the Kamala-Balan.
137. At that time in Rajdhani Nagar, a new paper was being placed on Rachna Sinha's desk.

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Synopsis Group 15 — Original Episodes 141–150

Index of Original Episode Openings

141. By this time, Devanshu Rakshit had completed his prison term.

142. Haricharan Mandal's old file was opened.

143. Rachna went to see Mrinalini herself.

144. The first decisive search in the current gambling investigation took place at Keshav Mehta's house and private office on the same morning.

145. Keshav was arrested.

146. Keshav was sent into judicial custody.

147. In the prison library, Pradeep met a new inmate.

Synopsis Group 16 — Original Episodes 151–160

Index of Original Episode Openings

1 / 2

151. Nalin Barua said—

152. Nalin disclosed one more thing.

153. This time, Aditi Lal herself brought out an old chest.

154. On the strength of all this new material, Rachna recommended formally reopening the old death investigation.

155. The private gambling network did not shut down immediately after Keshav's arrest.

156. One evening in Garh Narikel, Mrinalini sat alone on the veranda.

157. In the investigation room at Rajdhani Nagar, Rachna Sinha sat alone at night.

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Synopsis Group 16 — Original Episodes 151–160

Index of Original Episode Openings

found alive: Basudev Marik.

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Synopsis Group 17 — Original Episodes 161–170

Index of Original Episode Openings

161. The old transport-licence records produced five men named Kaushal.
162. Rachna did not immediately inform Mrinalini of this discovery.
163. Pressure was mounting on Manoj Nayak in the current gambling network.
164. Arrangements were made for Ritesh's statement to be taken before a magistrate.
165. Manoj Nayak was summoned for questioning again.
166. The corporate records of Lokvistar Digital Services listed no director named 'Uday.'
167. Meanwhile, the tragedy of online gambling erupted in another household.

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Synopsis Group 18 — Original Episodes 171–180

Index of Original Episode Openings

171. Udaynath's financial dealings appeared clean.

172. Two such separate worlds had also been created in the old Satyaprakash investigation.

173. A new fact emerged from Manoj's telephone records.

174. Three days later, Raghuvir was caught at the state border.

175. Amid the separate statements of Keshav, Manoj and Raghuvir, a new name appeared not repeatedly, but only once—

176. That night in Garh Narikel, Mrinalini held Satyaprakash's old spectacles in her hand.

177. Rachna Sinha opened Saurabh Bardhan's file.

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Synopsis Group 18 — Original Episodes 171–180

Index of Original Episode Openings

the record of an important meeting.

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Synopsis Group 19 — Original Episodes 181–190

Index of Original Episode Openings

181. Udaynath was not arrested immediately.

182. Pradeep was in his third month in the district jail.

183. Trisha came again for the next visit.

184. The proceeds of crime were not found flowing directly into Saurabh's personal account in his financial history.

185. Rachna questioned Saurabh again about this structure.

186. A lawful copy of the backup from Alok Bhasin's old company laptop was available.

187. The news of Saurabh's arrest reached Garh Narikel.

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Synopsis Group 19 — Original Episodes 181–190

Index of Original Episode Openings

grandson opened the door.

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Synopsis Group 20 — Original Episodes 191–200

Index of Original Episode Openings

191. Three days later, Ramavatar's grandson himself telephoned Rachna.

192. Saurabh Bardhan was remanded to judicial custody.

193. Meanwhile, Ishan was presenting his report on mule-account risks to the State Bankers' Association.

194. That night, Mrinalini heard about Ishan's presentation over the telephone.

195. At the final meeting of the night, Rachna Sinha placed two files before her team.

196. Ramavatar's health deteriorated again.

197. There was torrential rain in Garh Narikel that night.

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Synopsis Group 20 — Original Episodes 191–200

Index of Original Episode Openings

2 / 2

killed.

200. This time, Saurabh's interrogation was brief.

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Synopsis Group 21 — Original Episodes 201–210

Index of Original Episode Openings

201. Thirty families were staying at the relief camp in Garh Narikel's school.

202. By dawn, the waters of the Kamala-Balan had risen further.

203. In Rajdhani Nagar, a new lead concerning the vehicle in the old accident investigation came from insurance records.

204. Rachna decided to question Devanshu Rakshit once more.

205. Devanshu's new statement was not immediately accepted as true.

206. Mrinalini received the news from Rachna, not from Ishan.

207. Manoj Nayak was arrested in the new gambling case.

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Synopsis Group 22 — Original Episodes 211–220

Index of Original Episode Openings

211. Rachna Sinha wrote the interim report on the old investigation.

212. Mrinalini read the public summary of the report.

213. The charge sheet in the new gambling case began to take shape.

214. Another list was drawn up—

215. When Rachna left her office in Rajdhani Nagar that night, the rain had stopped.

216. The night was clear in Garh Narikel.

217. The first detailed hearing in the new criminal case began in the special court at

Synopsis Group 23 — Original Episodes 221–230

Index of Original Episode Openings

221. Abhishek's testimony was even more difficult.
222. Ritesh Das's testimony lasted all day.
223. The assault case against Raghuvir Tanti was relatively straightforward.
224. When Pradeep Mahajan entered the witness box, the atmosphere in the courtroom changed.
225. The defence wanted to present an extract from Pradeep's prison diary—
226. Keshav Mehta's defence strategy was clear—
227. Saurabh Bardhan's defence was more complicated.

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Synopsis Group 24 — Original Episodes 231–240

Index of Original Episode Openings

231. The old Satyaprakash case reached the stage of preliminary consideration of charges in court.

232. As Devanshu descended the steps outside the courthouse, he staggered.

233. In the new trial, testimony came from a crucial digital expert.

234. Mayank Jha appeared as a financial expert witness.

235. Outside the court, Shailesh Mandal's wife Aarti came to meet him for the first time.

236. Ritesh Das, too, returned to his village after becoming a witness under government protection.

237. One day, during Saurabh Bardhan's bail period, the Uttarayan Fund itself made an

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Synopsis Group 24 — Original Episodes 231–240

Index of Original Episode Openings

home.

240. The mongoose appeared again in Garh Narikel.

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Synopsis Group 25 — Original Episodes 241–250

Index of Original Episode Openings

241. The trial in the special court continued month after month.

242. The courtroom was full on the day Manoj Nayak was cross-examined.

243. Two associates of Raghuvir admitted their involvement in a separate case and applied for lighter sentences.

244. In his closing argument, Saurabh Bardhan's counsel said—

245. Keshav Mehta's closing argument became more personal.

246. In his closing argument, Pradeep Mahajan's lawyer was already looking ahead to sentencing.

247. In the old Satyaprakash case, Devanshu's trial was proceeding slowly in a different court

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Synopsis Group 25 — Original Episodes 241–250

Index of Original Episode Openings

enough room in the courtroom.

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Synopsis Group 26 — Original Episodes 251–260

Index of Original Episode Openings

251. Within five minutes, the media outside had made headlines—
252. On the day of sentencing, Pradeep's daughter Trisha came.
253. Vihan Sarang was not in court when Keshav's sentence was pronounced.
254. Hearing Manoj's sentence, his mother wept and said—
255. The judgment in the old Satyaprakash case was still pending.
256. In the closing arguments in Devanshu's case, the prosecution said—
257. On the day of judgment, Mrinalini came.

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Synopsis Group 27 — Original Episodes 261–270

Index of Original Episode Openings

261. That evening, Ishan went alone to the banks of the Kamala-Balan.

262. In Rajdhani Nagar, Rachna Sinha was wiping the board clean at the final joint review meeting.

263. Ishan added one line to the final public report of his mule-account risk project—

264. One day, while cleaning the courtyard, Mrinalini spread Dhaneshwari's soaked manuscript in the sun to dry.

265. At night, there was a rustling outside the threshold.

266. The city did not become peaceful after the judgments.

267. Saurabh Bardhan filed an appeal.

Synopsis Group 28 — Original Episodes 271–280

Index of Original Episode Openings

271. Ishan's mule-account project became part of the training curriculum at two universities in the state.

272. Sabina Khatun's tailoring shop reopened.

273. Abhishek's sister Manjari was close to completing her nursing training.

274. Shailesh Mandal did not immediately return to his teaching job.

275. Ritesh Das changed the name of his mobile-phone repair shop—

276. Devanshu Rakshit appealed against his sentence.

277. Aniruddha Chaudhary's health declined rapidly.

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Synopsis Group 29 — Original Episodes 281–290

Index of Original Episode Openings

281. In the new public records of the Udayrekha Public Trust and Uttarayan, Satyaprakash's objection was recorded under his full name.

282. New repairs to the embankment began along the Kamala-Balan.

283. One evening, a small mongoose entered the courtyard.

284. At night, Ishan sat with his mother on the veranda.

285. The night deepened.

286. The first training session took place at Rachna Sinha's new office.

287. The first light of dawn in Garh Narikel

Synopsis Group 30 — Original Episodes 291–300

Index of Original Episode Openings

291. A few days later, a lawful rehabilitation session on financial crime was held in the prison.

292. Saurabh began serving part of his sentence in prison.

293. Pradeep was released after completing the remainder of his prison term.

294. After studying 'criminal intent' in her first-year law class, Trisha came home.

295. One day, Mrinalini said to Ishan—

296. Ishan did not begin writing.

297. While investigating in her new district, Rachna Sinha stopped an order to arrest a young man.

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Synopsis Group 30 — Original Episodes 291–300

Index of Original Episode Openings

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Synopsis Group 31 — Original Episodes 301–310

Index of Original Episode Openings

301. Abhishek volunteered at a local bank awareness camp.

302. After the Uttarayan Fund was restructured, Saurabh's name was removed from its governing board.

303. Mrinalini donated part of that amount to a school book fund in the village in Dhaneshwari's name.

304. A year later, a young woman from Ishan's training course came to Garh Narikel.

305. At dusk, Vaidehi went to see the banks of the Kamala-Balan.

306. That night, Mrinalini opened the manuscript.

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Synopsis Group 32 — Original Episodes 311–320

Index of Original Episode Openings

311. The fraud network in Rachna Sinha's new district proved smaller than expected.
312. A new example appeared in Ishan's training sessions.
313. Mrinalini went to the school to see the books in the Dhaneshwari Memorial Book Fund.
314. Pradeep's financial-literacy classes gradually became well known.
315. Manoj Nayak's appeal was partly successful.
316. One day in the market, Ritesh encountered Manoj's father.
317. Preparing a further appeal, Saurabh Bardhan requested old Uttarayan records.

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Synopsis Group 33 — Original Episodes 321–330

Index of Original Episode Openings

321. A new family of mongooses settled in the courtyard.

322. One day, an actual crocodile was seen sunning itself on the banks of the Kamala-Balan.

323. Mrinalini read that line.

324. Time moved further on.

325. One night, Mrinalini called Ishan to her.

326. Mist over the Kamala-Balan at dawn.

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Synopsis Group 34 — Original Episodes 331–340

Index of Original Episode Openings

331. Vihan Sarang sent Ishan an invitation to a public seminar at Ambar's new office.
332. Ishan did not name any criminal in his presentation.
333. After the seminar, Vihan said privately to Ishan—
334. Saurabh's further appeal was partly allowed.
335. Keshav began writing regularly in the prison library.
336. A teenager came to Ritesh's shop.
337. A financial-awareness week was held at Shailesh's school.

Synopsis Group 35 — Original Episodes 341–350

Index of Original Episode Openings

341. At dawn, Ishan opened the manuscript.
342. This year, the water was low along the Kamala-Balan.
343. Little by little, Ishan's writing became part of the household.
344. One day, Ishan received a call from the bankers' association.
345. Rachna Sinha encountered a similar case too.
346. Ishan developed a training module on this new risk.
347. Hearing about this training, Mrinalini laughed.

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Synopsis Group 36 — Original Episodes 351–360

Index of Original Episode Openings

351. Ritesh's shop began to provide a steady income.

352. Vihan Sarang prepared Ambar's training room.

353. Saurabh Bardhan was released after serving the remainder of his sentence.

354. Mrinalini was growing old.

355. Dhaneshwari's manuscript was now kept not on top of a cupboard but beside Mrinalini's pillow.

356. One day, Vaidehi Jha arrived carrying the final copy of her thesis.

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Synopsis Group 37 — Original Episodes 361–370

Index of Original Episode Openings

361. Returning to Garh Narikel, she put Dhaneshwari's manuscript beside her pillow.

362. Ishan slowed his writing.

363. One evening, opening the manuscript, she asked him to write the eighth line.

364. In the middle of a training session, Rachna Sinha heard about a case—

365. Trisha came to Garh Narikel during her holiday.

366. Ishan made a small sheet containing the eight lines.

367. A few weeks later, Mrinalini's breathing worsened again.

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Synopsis Group 38 — Original Episodes 371–380

Index of Original Episode Openings

371. Rachna Sinha saw an anonymous page in her office.

372. One night, Ishan reread the final third of his manuscript.

373. The following morning, Mrinalini's health suddenly deteriorated sharply.

374. The day passed slowly.

375. Shortly before dawn, Mrinalini passed away.

376. The funeral was simple.

377. After the thirteenth-day rites, Ishan sat alone on the veranda for the first time.

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Synopsis Group 39 — Original Episodes 381–390

Index of Original Episode Openings

381. Ishan reopened his manuscript.

382. He went to the banks of the Kamala-Balan months later.

383. In the first year after Mrinalini's death, the seasons became distances rather than seasons for Ishan.

384. One day, someone proposed keeping Dhaneshwari's manuscript in a glass case in the school library.

385. Trisha completed her legal studies and became an advocate.

386. That night, she telephoned Pradeep.

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Synopsis Group 39 — Original Episodes 381–390

Index of Original Episode Openings

after completing his sentence.

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Synopsis Group 40 — Original Episodes 391–400

Index of Original Episode Openings

391. Saurabh never returned fully to public life.

392. One day, returning from a training class, Pradeep found that Trisha had brought home Dhaneshwari's eight lines in a frame.

393. A year later, the pupil caught playing a gambling-like game at Shailesh's school passed his school examination and went to the city to study...

394. A government poster was put up outside Sabina Khatun's shop—

395. Vaidehi Jha's research was published as a book.

396. While writing the final section of his manuscript, Ishan became stuck on a problem—

Synopsis Group 40 — Original Episodes 391–400

ceremony on the day of her retirement.

400. Ishan did not conduct a final formal interview with Rachna.

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Synopsis Group 41 — Original Episodes 401–410

Index of Original Episode Openings

401. A new paved path was built along the Kamala-Balan.

402. At night, Ishan began writing the last pages of his manuscript.

403. At dawn, he stepped out onto the veranda.

404. A year later, Ishan's novel was nearly finished.

405. That week, Rachna Sinha called.

406. Trisha was now practising law regularly.

407. Keshav declined an invitation to speak at a public rehabilitation programme.

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Synopsis Group 42 — Original Episodes 411–418

Index of Original Episode Openings

411. Ishan's final revisions to his manuscript gathered pace.

412. Trisha came to the village for a weekend.

413. That night, Ishan went alone to the riverside.

414. Returning home, he wrote the final page.

415. At dawn, Ishan opened Dhaneshwari's manuscript.

416. At noon, two schoolchildren came to return books.

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WORK / कृति

07 · The Name Written Inside the Leaves

32 Chapters

Chapter 1 — The Day the House Was Opened

Five years later, Mrinalini comes to open her ancestral house. The family has already decided to sell it, and Ishan gives her three months to sort the papers and objects associated with its memories. Basanti Kaki's curd and flattened rice, the old kitchen, the grinding stone and the tastes of childhood make her realise that photographs and inventories cannot contain the full history of smells, voices and labour. Kaki raises the question of remembering unnamed people as well as unsigned papers. In an upstairs room, Mrinalini finds a “Bhanas-Pothi,” or kitchen manuscript, in a chest. Beside the principal Devanagari writing she notices unfamiliar, fine handwriting, possibly in Tirhuta. Her task begins to change from making a routine

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Chapter 1 — The Day the House Was Opened

inventory into investigating history.

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Chapter 2 — The Second Handwriting

Ishan sees the discovered kitchen manuscript as a possible book and commercial attraction, but Mrinalini refuses publicity before establishing its authorship. The main text is written in an orderly Devanagari hand, while the margins contain observations, questions and corrections in Tirhuta by another hand. Shashibhushan Kaka confidently attributes the manuscript to Devkant and promises to bring samples of his handwriting; Mrinalini insists on comparing the evidence. On page seventeen, “salt to taste” has been added after a fixed measurement of salt. The alteration suggests a dialogue between two ways of knowing: one seeking a definite measure, the other attending to differences in circumstances and taste. Instead of beginning

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Chapter 2 — The Second Handwriting

with an author's name, Mrinalini decides first to gather proof.

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Chapter 3 — The Leaf

Mrinalini examines the manuscript's pages, dates and a dry leaf pressed between them. Basanti Kaki thinks it may be a tilkor leaf, but its identification is not treated as certain. The dates are not in a straightforward sequence, and a page for 15 January is incomplete. Mrinalini takes care to keep the documentary chronology separate from her own imagination. The narrative then moves into an earlier period. Returning from Calcutta, Devkant wishes to gather knowledge of food and everyday life; Janki teaches him to eat first and write afterwards. While leaves are being sorted, he meets Madhavi. Janki makes it clear that Madhavi knows more about many leafy vegetables than she does herself. Here begins the human story behind the old

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Chapter 3 — The Leaf

kitchen manuscript.

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Chapter 4 — The Fifteenth of January

On the morning of 15 January 1934, Devkant is taking notes on ordinary food, washing rice and the labour of the kitchen. An earthquake suddenly shakes the ground, the house and the routines of everyday life. The kitchen wall cracks, people rush outside, and the courtyard becomes a temporary shelter for neighbours. Madhavi tends an injured child, decides that people must stay away from an unsafe room, and instructs them to boil water first for drinking and cleaning wounds. Her practical judgment proves the most useful knowledge in the disaster. For the first time, Devkant records not merely an ingredient but the name of the person who made a decision: “Madhavi—water first.” He adopts a rule for the manuscript: the name of whoever

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Chapter 4 — The Fifteenth of January

makes a decision must be recorded.

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Chapter 5 — The House of Khichdi

After the earthquake, food grain is scarce in the house, and the problem is how to feed neighbours, older people and the injured who have taken shelter there. One pot of khichdi is prepared for everyone. The proportions of rice, lentils and water, the fuel and the order of serving must all change with the circumstances. Although old social habits and reluctance about sharing vessels do not disappear completely, the needs of children, those in distress and those doing the work take precedence. The contributions of Madhavi, Janki, Hemlata, Ramanand and others enter Devkant's notes. Devkant himself learns to serve food with a ladle. Janki's laughter about the shortage of salt lightens the fearful atmosphere. He understands that the

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Chapter 5 — The House of Khichdi

history of food during a disaster concerns not simply a recipe, but many helping hands, the taste of circumstances and the names of those involved.

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Chapter 6 — Madhavi

On the third morning after the earthquake, Madhavi teaches Devkant to identify tilkor and other leaves in the garden. Merely writing “tender” cannot explain the differences in softness, veins and stems; touch and practice are required. When Devkant asks how she knows so much, she describes the tradition of knowledge acquired from fields, ponds, the women of the household and her maternal grandfather, and shows him her writing in Tirhuta. Devkant proposes that they make a shared kitchen manuscript. Madhavi sets five conditions: each contributor must be named; unknown facts must not be invented; no single household must stand for the whole of Mithila; private pages must remain private; and changes of language must be agreed upon

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Chapter 6 — Madhavi

for their meaning. Devkant accepts. Their agreement turns a single writer's undertaking into shared intellectual labour.

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Chapter 7 — The Month of Kurthi

On a winter evening, kurthi lentils are cooked. Janki recounts a family belief that eating kurthi for a month each year prevents stones from forming in the body. Devkant initially records it as an established medical fact, but Madhavi asks whether it is direct experience, something heard from others or tested evidence. Both treating an untested folk belief as fact and mocking it are judged inappropriate. Devkant divides his notes into three categories: “Heard,” “Observed” and “To Ask.” They plan to inquire with a traditional physician, other families and cultivators. The chapter brings into focus the difference between local experience and medical evidence, the sources of claims, and the honesty required to leave a question open

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Chapter 7 — The Month of Kurthi

for examination.

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Chapter 8 — The Measure of Salt

Devkant enters the kitchen with scales and weights to determine a scientific measure of salt. Madhavi and Janki ask how many people will eat, how hungry they are, which salt is being used, what accompanies the food and whose “pinch” is meant. A fixed quantity cannot suit every circumstance. Madhavi has him taste lentils from three different households. Even the same pigeon-pea dal tastes different according to the water, fire, cooking vessel, serving and the preferences of the family. Devkant eventually agrees to record a basic method together with variations and indications for checking by direct experience. Nor is “to taste” easily conveyed in English. The chapter makes clear the limits of turning a measurement in one recipe

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Chapter 8 — The Measure of Salt

into an absolute rule for an entire community.

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Chapter 9 — Tilkor

Tilkor tarua is made for the guests. Madhavi demonstrates how to select tender leaves, wash and dry them, judge the consistency of the pithar batter and distinguish the temperature of the oil. Janki and Hemlata also undertake different tasks. At first Devkant seeks one “principal maker” of the dish, but ultimately records each person's contribution by name. Madhavi meanwhile has a particularly tender tarua placed on his plate. He senses something personal in the gesture but refuses to turn his inference into a certain fact. A choice between “aaj” and the Maithili “ai” in the writing opens the question of language and the voice of the household. Shared recognition of labour, linguistic naturalness and the unspoken closeness

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Chapter 9 — Tilkor

between Devkant and Madhavi develop together.

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Chapter 10 — The Eye of the Pond

At dawn Madhavi takes Devkant to see the pond with Ramanand. Behind the beautiful water visible from above lie the dangers of collecting makhana seeds, mud, thorns, work done while holding one's breath, uncertain wages and the system of ownership. Ramanand shows his scarred hands and demonstrates his work. He says that writing only “the seeds were collected” makes the body's labour invisible. The subsequent processes of drying and heating the seeds and striking them to pop the makhana are also shown. Devkant replaces his superficial description of an “excellent festive delicacy” with the full context of labour in the water. Ramanand's name and testimony are recorded. The heavy work concealed behind the light taste of makhana is

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Chapter 10 — The Eye of the Pond

the chapter's central truth.

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Chapter 11 — Steam

Janki and Madhavi teach Devkant to make bagiya from rice-flour dough with a lentil filling. The amount of water in the dough, the sealing of the edges, the heat of the steam and the signs that the food is cooked cannot be determined by clock time alone. Devkant's first bagiya splits; his second attempt improves. He learns to avoid the mistake of presenting his own experience as though it were Madhavi's statement. Madhavi shares half a bagiya with him, and the small, natural act discloses a subtle intimacy in their relationship. Hemlata says she wishes to write her own history, and Devkant records this under her name. Alongside the cooking method, the chapter teaches the importance of personal attribution, the record of

Chapter 11 — Steam

unsuccessful experience and the safeguarding of inward meaning without imposing a metaphor upon it.

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Chapter 12 — The Fish Bone

At the fish market, Nasima teaches Devkant about large and small fish, signs of freshness, prices and bargaining practices. Madhavi and Nasima warn him not to turn one family's rules into the unchanging dietary laws of all Mithila. When fish is prepared at home, they discuss cleaning, bones, utensils and the different habits of those who eat it. A fish bone sticks in Devkant's throat as he eats, revealing the bodily carelessness of the very man recording cooking instructions. That evening Madhavi challenges his English sentence, “Maithils like fish,” with a single question: “All of them?” Devkant realises that an attractive generalisation can erase the differences among many people. Nasima's name and first-hand knowledge of the

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Chapter 12 — The Fish Bone

market become essential sources for the written account.

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Chapter 13 — Letters

Devkant learns Tirhuta and tries to read the pages written by Madhavi. The question arises whether they should be transcribed into Devanagari to make printing and wider reading easier. Madhavi asks: easier for whom, and where will the voice of the original letters survive? She clearly maintains the boundaries around her private papers. While writing the tilkor recipe, she insists on keeping “pithar” rather than the generic “batter,” and “paat” rather than the generic “leaf,” demonstrating the relation between language and meaning. Finally she signs the bottom of the page in Tirhuta and requires that the person's name accompany the knowledge. Devkant agrees to preserve the original signature and add a Devanagari rendering for

Chapter 13 — Letters

readers.

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Chapter 14 — Words That Cannot Be Translated

For an English article, Devkant searches for translations of words such as tarua, bagiya, amat, adauri, paag and paanti. Madhavi shows him that a single English expression often cannot encompass the thing itself, its method of preparation, the season, its social context and the voice of the home. Together they decide that the original Maithili names will remain, with adequate explanations at their first occurrence. Calling tilkor simply “fried leaves” obscures the full process of selection and labour. Their conversation gradually becomes an understanding between them: what one has not understood must not be filled in with guesses. In a quiet moment when they share paan, their unspoken affection becomes visible. The conviction

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Chapter 14 — Words That Cannot Be Translated

grows that not every flavour, word or experience must be enclosed within a book.

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Chapter 15 — A Plate of Tarua

In summer Janki has five kinds of tarua prepared: kadima, potato, aubergine, tilkor and raw banana. Their different textures, moisture and cooking times are demonstrated even when the same pithar batter is used. While arranging a guest's plate, Devkant wishes to represent all Mithila through the metaphor of one platter. Madhavi asks what will become of the labour, deprivation, people and foods left outside that arrangement. The limitation of the metaphor is noted. Sharda, an educated guest, discusses Devkant's article and Madhavi's contribution. During the easy conversation between Devkant and Sharda, Madhavi's silence seems to change; yet Devkant does not label her feeling “jealousy” without evidence. At the end, a piece of

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Chapter 15 — A Plate of Tarua

tilkor that Madhavi gives him preserves the relationship's unspoken meaning.

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Chapter 16 — Mango Amat

During mango season, Madhavi and Janki slice green mangoes and dry them in the sun to make amat. The varieties of mango, cutting, sunlight, dampness, aroma and precautions in storage help Devkant understand that preserving food means preserving for the future the flavour of a season that will no longer be present. Meanwhile, an editor in Calcutta requests a quick, concise article and specifically asks him to reduce the domestic detail. Devkant considers an important statement of Madhavi's suitable for the conclusion of an English essay: preserving a flavour should also mean preserving the names of the hands that gave the knowledge. Yet anxiety about space and acceptance presses him to shorten or remove it. The preservation of

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Chapter 16 — Mango Amat

food across seasons thus sharpens the question of preserving credit in written history.

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Chapter 17 — Arikanchan

At the beginning of the rains, the preparation of arikanchan reveals the work of arranging taro leaves, spices and careful folds in successive layers. Devkant sees that something appearing to be a single object from the outside contains the labour of many leaves within it. Madhavi refuses to let certain private Tirhuta pages associated with her maternal grandmother become part of the public manuscript. Devkant urges her to let him see them in the name of their usefulness as knowledge, but Madhavi makes clear that the final decision about her private papers is hers. In heavy rain, a personal page slips from its bundle and opens. Although Devkant could read it, he puts it safely away without doing so. Madhavi's trust deepens. The

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Chapter 17 — Arikanchan

chapter establishes an essential boundary between shared learning and an individual's right to privacy.

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Chapter 18 — A Recipe Without a Name

A dish made with the first kadima flowers of the rainy season is prepared. Madhavi describes a method associated with her maternal grandmother Dhaneshwari and Dhaneshwari's elder sister. But because neither the local name's pronunciation nor its written form is certain, she asks that the heading be left blank. The line identifying the source also becomes blurred and is interrupted before completion. The story returns to 2026, where Mrinalini sees the empty heading, rubbed or erased ink and possible letters reading “Madh…” on the corresponding manuscript page. She deliberately does not complete them as “Madhavi.” Ishan wants to put the dish on his restaurant menu, but they agree to withhold its name pending investigation. The

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Chapter 18 — A Recipe Without a Name

blank space is no longer an ordinary oversight: it has become an evidentiary question about the possible erasure of a contributor's credit.

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Chapter 19 — The Road to Janakpur

Devkant, Madhavi, Hemlata and Gonu set out for Janakpur. The journey begins with travel food such as flattened rice, sattu, jaggery and amat, and reveals the landscape after the 1934 earthquake, difficult roads and kinship across the India–Nepal border. Devkant finds that, however straight a boundary may appear on a paper map, people's speech, ingredients, names and practices do not obey it so simply. In the Janakpur market, dishes that look alike have different names and methods of preparation. Madhavi disappears from sight for a short while in the crowd. Searching for her, Devkant recognises a deep fear within himself. Once Madhavi is found safe, the possibility of love becomes clearer, but neither rushes to give the

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Chapter 19 — The Road to Janakpur

relationship a name.

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Chapter 20 — Rain

After their return from Janakpur, continuous rain affects fresh food, dried amat, the stores, the hearth and the papers alike. Madhavi, Janki and Hemlata separate materials that have become damp and use adauri, amat and other foods preserved according to the season. Devkant understands that storage is a family's labour on behalf of future hunger. Raindrops wet several pages of the kitchen manuscript, putting the safety of the notes on fish, including Nasima's name, at risk. They judge it necessary to preserve the original pages, make fresh copies and record damaged portions as damaged rather than silently restoring them. Food and documents are both vulnerable stores: one safeguards the body's future, the other the future of

Chapter 20 — Rain

memory.

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Chapter 21 — Adauri

When the weather clears during the rains, work begins on preparing adauri. Soaking lentils, judging their consistency when ground, making small portions, exposing them to sunshine, turning them and protecting them from moisture all demand time and sustained labour. Devkant grasps the meaning of work done on sunny days for hunger on days yet to come. In the same chapter, Hemlata practises Tirhuta and Devanagari while making careful copies of the old kitchen pages. She preserves the contributors' names in the notes on tilkor, amat, adauri and Nasima's fish. Rather than reproduce Madhavi's signature as her own copy, she writes, “Madhavi's signature on the original page.” She expressly adopts the rule that faded or crossed-out

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Chapter 21 — Adauri

wording must not be repaired on one's own initiative. This practice manuscript acquires importance for future verification.

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Chapter 22 — The Fold of Pirukiya

During a festival, pirukiya is prepared at home. Working with the filling, the dough and the folds along the edge, Hemlata slowly acquires the skill by hand; Devkant records her first successful fold under her own name. Remembering Devkant's taste for sweets, Madhavi prepares a separate pirukiya for him. That night Devkant puts into plain words the love he began to feel in Janakpur. Madhavi does not reject his feelings, but asks what equality and companionship will mean in the face of family, lineage, social prestige and opposition. Devkant cannot give an immediate, definite answer and admits, “I do not yet know.” The well-formed fold of the pirukiya suggests the delicacy of joining two lives: the sweetness of love must be

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Chapter 22 — The Fold of Pirukiya

accompanied by difficult social decisions.

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Chapter 23 — The Deleted Line

The editor in Calcutta returns the English article with instructions to shorten it. He suggests retaining the descriptions of food but setting aside the discussion of women's labour, sources, names and recognition. Madhavi points out to Devkant that the author still makes the final editorial decision. During the shortening, the sentence “The history of the kitchen is incomplete without the names of the women who made it” is cut. Devkant promises to include it in another article in the future, but does not put it back now. Madhavi takes possession again of her private pages and certain source pages from the shared manuscript and decides that trust must be reconsidered. Devkant could restore the deleted sentence until the very last

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Chapter 23 — The Deleted Line

moment, yet sends the sealed envelope by post. The first direct rupture opens between love and intellectual ethics.

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Chapter 24 — Outside the Feast

At a large ceremonial feast in the house, Devkant welcomes guests and supervises the arrangements outside, while women, Gonu and numerous helpers have been preparing the meal inside since dawn. The order of serving, favoured guests, separate vessels, the seating of those who labour and the women waiting to eat last all make social relations visible. People outside praise “the feast of Mithila,” but the work and distinctions behind it often remain unnamed. Devkant carefully restricts what he records to what he witnessed at this particular ceremony in this particular household. Describing the pages as “my collection” makes him uneasy, for the work of Nasima, Madhavi, Janki, Ramanand and Hemlata is contained in them.

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Chapter 25 — The Published Article

Devkant's English article appears in a Calcutta magazine. The family is proud, but only Devkant's name appears beneath the title, although many important methods and ideas came from Madhavi and other sources. Comparing the texts directly, Madhavi shows how the names of those who contributed knowledge have disappeared from the printed version. More seriously, after editing, Janki's folk belief concerning kurthi is presented almost as a medical rule, although the original notes explicitly said “verification pending.” Devkant writes a letter seeking a public correction and recognition of the sources. Madhavi considers this necessary but insufficient, because the first printed version has already reached readers without those names.

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Chapter 25 — The Published Article

She takes back some of her pages; the ethical fracture becomes public.

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Chapter 26 — What Was Left Unsaid

The family brings Devkant a marriage proposal from a wealthy household. Although his heart is with Madhavi, he cannot at first speak her name clearly before his father and the elders. Madhavi decides to leave for Janakpur for a few days. In their conversation beside the pond, they acknowledge love but cannot agree on their future; Madhavi retains the right to decide independently about her life and papers. Before her departure, Devkant speaks Madhavi's name to his family, but their social response remains unresolved. Madhavi takes her original papers with her, and Hemlata safeguards her own practice notebook. Devkant records Madhavi as an important participating source of knowledge in the manuscript, but does not call her a

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Chapter 26 — What Was Left Unsaid

“co-author” without her consent. Her departure is certain; whether she will return remains uncertain.

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Chapter 27 — The Kitchen of Today

In 2026, Ishan's modern restaurant “Mithila Experience” holds a tasting event. Tilkor, makhana, bagiya and kurthi are presented as heritage flavours. Mrinalini examines the sources, producers, labour and written claims associated with each dish. On the promotional leaflet for kurthi, she finds that a local belief has mistakenly been turned into a health claim that it “prevents stones.” She shows Ishan the cautions in the original kitchen manuscript, and they debate correcting the business presentation on the basis of truth and respect for sources. That night, eating Basanti Kaki's simple meal of kurthi dal and rice, Mrinalini feels that taste is not merely a decorative or marketing commodity; it is a combined experience of

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Chapter 27 — The Kitchen of Today

labour, memory, hunger and relationships. They also decide to retain the incorrect advertisement in the archive.

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Chapter 28 — Who Owns the Taste?

A publisher offers money to issue the old kitchen manuscript as an attractive heritage edition called “Devkant's Mithila Kitchen.” Ishan and Shashibhushan are excited, but Mrinalini blocks publication until the authorship is investigated and contributors receive proper credit. She explains that physical possession of paper, authorship of its written text, the sources of its knowledge and the right to decide publication are separate questions. The principal Devanagari hand is connected with Devkant, but the Tirhuta marginalia, Madhavi's contribution and Hemlata's copies cannot be ignored. With publication postponed, Mrinalini begins looking into old connections in Nepal and the unfinished leaf. “Who owns the taste?” becomes a

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Chapter 28 — Who Owns the Taste?

question extending far beyond the rights of one family or the market.

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Chapter 29 — Renuka’s Memory

Mrinalini travels to Janakpur and meets the elderly Renuka. She shows Renuka images of the original manuscript, Tirhuta pages and samples of Hemlata's handwriting, without suggesting what the answers should be. Renuka explains the limits of oral memory and, in particular, corrects the widespread misconception that Madhavi and Hemlata were biological sisters. Hemlata's practice manuscript, kept in Renuka's possession, gives explicit credit alongside tilkor, amat and other materials, including phrases such as “heard from/seen with Madhavi Didi.” Some meanings associated with names, dates, songs and marks of leaves remain unverified. With Renuka's permission, Mrinalini records images of selected pages and oral recollections. She

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Chapter 29 — Renuka’s Memory

returns not with a single conclusion but with written and oral evidence that can be checked against one another.

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Chapter 30 — The Last Leaf

Using the copies obtained in Janakpur, Mrinalini re-examines pages 41–42 of the original manuscript, those concerning tilkor. Because an additional paper may lie between the layers of a page, she arranges a careful expert examination. A small Tirhuta slip is found. The opening appears to read “I, Madhavi,” and the date 21.9.1934 can be identified with considerable confidence. A later Devanagari note may indicate an intention to restore Madhavi's omitted name; its handwriting resembles Devkant's principal hand, but final verification remains outstanding. Mrinalini neither immediately absolves anyone of the erasure nor dismisses the possible sign of regret. The recovered slip preserves Madhavi's name, but neither her complete life

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Chapter 30 — The Last Leaf

nor the justice due to her can yet be reconstructed.

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Chapter 31 — The Editor’s Wrongdoing

After finding Madhavi's slip, Mrinalini critically examines the typed copy she prepared in 2026. She discovers errors such as changing the original terms “pithar,” “bhanas,” “amat” and others for convenience, treating uncertain readings as certain, merging annotations in different hands into one sentence and moving source names into the margins. She realises that an editor's convenience can alter the voices of an author and a source. She accordingly establishes an editorial policy with images of the originals, a diplomatic transcription, a reader-friendly text, separate identification of different hands, attribution of sources, explicit uncertainty and an open account of all editorial interventions. At a family meeting,

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Chapter 31 — The Editor's Wrongdoing

Shashibhushan and Ishan abandon the claim of a single author and accept layered credit according to the evidence. Mrinalini also decides to preserve her flawed preliminary transcription in the archive.

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Chapter 32 — With the Names Included

The new publication draft is titled “Mithila Bhanas-Pothi.” It provides for credit, within the limits of the evidence, to Devkant for compiling and doing the principal writing; to Madhavi for her verified writing and knowledge; to Hemlata for her documentary copies; to Janki, Nasima, Ramanand and other sources; and to Mrinalini for her critical editing. Ishan's restaurant corrects its health claims and adds information about sources. The ancestral house is eventually sold, but the original documents are transferred to a secure archive. Before the family leaves, they share a meal in the old courtyard. Many questions about Madhavi's later life, marriage, place of residence and death remain unanswered. Mrinalini refuses to fill

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Chapter 32 — With the Names Included

those gaps with invention. In the final record she writes “Person's name: Madhavi,” preserving her name.

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WORK / कृति

08 · The Seventh Witness

42 Chapters

SECTION / खण्ड

Overview of the Story

08 · The Seventh Witness

Overview of the Story

The story of The Seventh Witness begins with the suspicious death of Vasudha Karna in a locked records room at the courthouse. A clock stopped at 4:17, missing documents, a teacup, a betel-nut box and the disappearance of Dulari Sadai form the elements of a mystery. Jaynarayan Mandal, Madhavi, Vinay Thakur and Abhiram gather different kinds of evidence concerning the incident.

Gradually the investigation becomes entangled with the land rights of the residents of Seven Hamlets, documents prepared after the earthquake of 1934, the unfinished history of Kusuma and Rasbihari, and the limitations of a computer-based analytical system called “Sutra.” Truth emerges not from calculation alone, nor memory or folklore alone, but from

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Overview of the Story

examining and cross-checking sources.

In the final part, a criminal judgment is delivered concerning Vasudha's death, but the dispute over land rights continues. After a new, intact version of an old letter is discovered, the question of its origin remains unanswered. This account preserves the distinction maintained by the original story: what is proved is presented as proved, what is possible as a possibility, and what is unknown as unknown.

Editorial note: The chapter-by-chapter accounts that follow disclose the resolution of the mystery, including the story's final events.

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Chapter 1 — Four Seventeen on a Rainy Morning

Overview of the Story

1 / 2

At dawn after a rainy night, the lawyer Vasudha Karna is found dead inside the courthouse’s old records room. The door is bolted from within, the wall clock has stopped at 4:17, and on the desk are a half-written warning, a betel-nut box, traces left by two cups of tea and signs of a missing document. Sub-inspector Vinay Thakur’s preliminary inquiry raises the possibility of suicide. Retired investigator Jaynarayan Mandal, however, notices discrepancies between the condition of the room and Vasudha’s everyday habits. Her colleague Madhavi begins supplying information. Dulari Sadai, a young woman who was among the last to visit Vasudha, has also failed to return home. The mystery of the death is thus joined to that of a

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Chapter 1 — Four Seventeen on a Rainy Morning

Overview of the Story

disappearance.

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Chapter 2 — The Betel-Nut Box

Overview of the Story

Jaynarayan interviews people at the courthouse separately, building up a picture of Vasudha’s character and routine. Madhavi explains that Vasudha never chewed betel nut at night, took no sugar in her tea and always placed the box on the right side of her desk. Two cups of tea were sent from Kamli Devi’s stall that night, but only a white cup was found at the scene; a blue-rimmed cup is subsequently recovered from a drain. Dulari’s mother, Phulo, speaks of threats and her missing daughter. Inconsistencies concerning Vasudha’s bag, a copy of an old land record and the betel-nut box deepen suspicion. Meanwhile, technical assistant Abhiram proposes using a system named “Sutra” to reconstruct the timeline. Its use sets off the first

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Chapter 2 — The Betel-Nut Box

Overview of the Story

2 / 2

debate between experienced observation and statistical information.

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Chapter 3 — Sutra’s First Answer

Overview of the Story

1 / 2

In Abhiram’s digitisation room, Sutra combines entry registers, lock sensors, telephone signals and movements of documents to display a possible sequence of events. Its initial calculation assigns a 61 per cent probability to suicide or accidental poisoning. Jaynarayan explains that a telephone’s location does not necessarily establish its owner’s location, and that the signal recording a lock’s opening is not a complete record of human movements. The calculation changes when the possibility of fastening the bolt through an air duct is included. Madhavi points out Dulari’s social circumstances and the use of shared telephones. Finally, a threat arrives on Madhavi’s phone: stop looking for Dulari and leave the “seventh page”

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Chapter 3 — Sutra’s First Answer

Overview of the Story

alone. The mystery takes a new turn.

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Chapter 4 — Dulari Is Missing

Overview of the Story

After the threat, Jaynarayan, Madhavi, Vinay and Abhiram visit Seven Hamlets to examine Dulari’s home, neighbourhood and night school. Her mother Phulo says that in the rain Dulari normally leaves her shoes at home and wears slippers; abandoned shoes are therefore no proof that she ran away. Her notebook contains a torn page, impressions left by writing and exercises in reading land documents. Alongside rumours circulating in the settlement about her character and supposed theft, accounts of threats against her begin to emerge. A line Dulari wrote herself—“I will not run away”—shows Madhavi her determination. The investigation questions the tendency to treat a poor young woman’s absence as evidence of wrongdoing.

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Chapter 5 — Madhavi’s First Dream

Overview of the Story

Exhausted by the search for Dulari and Vasudha’s death, Madhavi returns to her mother, Malati Devi. During the night she dreams mysteriously of seven steps, a red shawl and a wall that breathes. On waking, she sees specks of white dust on her palm and grows uneasy, yet tries not to confuse the dream with fact. Remembering a thick old book she had seen in Vasudha’s bag, she turns to the police inventory. Jaynarayan and Abhiram suggest investigating possible physical sources of the dust. In this chapter Madhavi’s guilt, memory, fear and inner experience come into conflict with the objective methods of the investigation, but no supernatural conclusion is announced.

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Chapter 6 — The Locked Room’s Second Breath

Overview of the Story

The investigation focuses on the ventilator in the locked records room and the old air duct behind it. Jaynarayan’s close inspection, Abhiram’s airflow tests and historical records of repairs to the building indicate that the seemingly sealed room has another passage by which air can enter. Dulari’s umbrella and the direction of the rain are also examined. The old building plan, an inspection panel and the connection with a repair room offer a possible physical explanation for the mysterious bolt, although the actual mechanism used on the night of the incident remains unproved. The suggestions of moving air and breathing walls that resemble Madhavi’s dream are treated as prompts for inquiry, not as evidence.

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Chapter 7 — Vasudha’s Home

Overview of the Story

Jaynarayan and Madhavi visit Vasudha’s grieving household and speak with her husband Arun, her brother Prakhar, her mother and her mother-in-law. Family members interpret her stubbornness, the land case, the threats against her and domestic tensions in different ways. In Vasudha’s study, they confirm her habit of folding the left corner of papers, her sugarless tea and other regular writing practices. Madhavi notices a message on Prakhar’s phone resembling “Do not call again,” but does not immediately treat it as proof of a crime. Laboratory testing of the cups confirms a difference in their sugar contents. The chapter also exposes the danger of turning the death into a story about family reputation and private relationships.

Chapter 8 — Everyday Habits

Overview of the Story

Kamli Devi, Madhavi and other acquaintances provide detailed information about Vasudha's daily schedule, tea, betel nut, manner of folding documents and work at the courthouse. Separate recollections and a simple experiment establish that a paper fold at the scene differs from her ordinary practice. Abhiram discovers information about the air passage in old repair records. Jaynarayan warns that a single habit cannot amount to conclusive legal proof, but the convergence of several inconsistencies can be an important line of inquiry. Madhavi and Abhiram's arguments gradually develop into cooperation and personal closeness. The chapter builds a method of reading a crime scene in light of the dead person's habitual behaviour.

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Chapter 9 — Madhavi and Abhiram

Overview of the Story

In the digitisation room one evening, Madhavi and Abhiram search old records concerning Seven Hamlets, 1934, the “seventh mark,” the birth-and-astrological register and the air passage. They talk at length about data, memory, trust and experiences from their own lives. Although possible historical images and entry-register information appear, Jaynarayan advises against definitive conclusions until the original sources have been inspected. Their discussion of Madhavi’s relationships begins to reveal Abhiram’s unspoken affection for her. They then learn that an old book wrapped in cloth has been secured inside Vasudha’s bag. The two walk home under one umbrella; amid the mystery, a thread of personal tenderness begins to unfold.

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Chapter 10 — The Book of Birth-Stars

Overview of the Story

In the presence of the police, Vasudha's sealed bag is opened. Inside is an old book entitled "Birth-Stars and the Household Register," recording not only birth dates but also memories of floods, marriages, domestic disputes, debts and displacement. Ambika Kaki tries to identify families, Kusuma, a red shawl, an old relief camp and seven identifying marks in its pages. An astrological register's transformation into a record of social history is an important turning point. Whether the "seventh witness" refers to a person or some form of authentication remains a question. Sutra warns of low confidence in its reading of the incomplete text, and the inquiry turns toward old family history.

Chapter 11 — A Lie Within the Family

Overview of the Story

By correlating road-camera footage, vehicle movements and telephone information, Sutra establishes that Vasudha’s husband Arun was wrong when he said he had not left home that night. Questioning reveals that he went out to assist his relative Rupa during a private medical emergency and lied to protect the family from embarrassment. It would be wrong to treat the lie as direct proof of his involvement in Vasudha’s death. Arun also suggests that Dulari was present during a late-night telephone conversation with Vasudha. His mother’s old family stories, including a reference to the “Bride’s Room,” lead the investigation towards a locked room in the house. The chapter shows that not every secret conceals a crime.

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Chapter 12 — The Bride’s Room

Overview of the Story

The locked “Bride’s Room” in Vasudha’s house is opened in the presence of authorised witnesses, with a formal inventory. Old photographs show the relief camp of 1934, a young woman in a red shawl and a ventilator resembling the one in the present records building. An elderly woman of the family hints at a long tradition of silence associated with Kusuma’s name. The objects, handwriting and photographs found in the room clarify Vasudha’s attempt to recover an older history. Some images resemble shapes from Madhavi’s dream, but the investigators do not accept the resemblance as independent evidence. The Bride’s Room brings family silence, folk memory and historical documents together.

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Chapter 13 — The Year of the Earthquake

Overview of the Story

The narrative moves back to the devastating earthquake of the month of Magh in the year 1990 of the Vikram calendar. At a relief camp, Kusuma, an educated young woman of a wealthy family, meets Rasbihari, who earns his living copying records. As they write down residents’ names, settlements, relief distributions and old boundaries, they see that a disaster destroys not only poor people’s homes but also the documentary proof of where they lived. Kusuma raises the need to preserve the names of women and men from disadvantaged families. The necessity of joint land rights for the families of Seven Hamlets gradually becomes clear. Amid social service and shared concern, Kusuma begins to feel affection for Rasbihari.

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Chapter 14 — A Forbidden Love

Overview of the Story

As their work at the relief camp increases, Kusuma and Rasbihari fall in love. Yet caste, money, family prestige and control over a woman’s independence all stand against the relationship. Kusuma’s uncle disapproves of her visiting the courthouse. Her grandmother’s birth-star register, letters and a private knot of blue thread become a symbolic language of affection. The two do not separate their relationship from their social responsibilities and the land rights of Seven Hamlets. Kusuma’s grandmother begins to suspect their feelings, but cautions her that love cannot endure for long on half-truths.

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Chapter 15 — Seven Hamlets

Overview of the Story

After the earthquake, the families of Seven Hamlets meet to preserve their names, boundaries, ponds, paths, shared rights of use and history of settlement. Drawing on the statements and thumbprints of representatives and on available maps, Rasbihari prepares a collective document; Kusuma contributes to the work as well. Making the document gives people, especially women and marginalised families, greater courage to assert their rights explicitly. Kusuma's signature becomes evidence against the interests of her own wealthy family. News of the document reaches her home, and her uncle forbids her to go out. The struggle for public rights becomes a rebellion within the household.

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Chapter 16 — The Missing Document

Overview of the Story

Kusuma is confined to the house. Meanwhile, the principal red file containing the original signatures and verification materials for the Seven Hamlets case disappears from the courthouse. Rasbihari is accused of removing it; rumours spread about bribery, a private relationship and disgrace to the family. Kusuma cannot go out, although a possibility arises of sending secret information through Nandlal. Her uncle tries to make her write that Rasbihari tricked her into signing. Kusuma flatly refuses to give a false statement. The mystery of the missing document and the question of a woman’s personal freedom become parts of the same conflict.

Chapter 17 — The Night of the Red Shawl

Overview of the Story

During a violent Ashadh downpour, Kusuma, kept inside the house, escapes through the rear with her grandmother’s assistance. She hopes to save a secure copy and the land papers belonging to the people of Seven Hamlets, and thinks of going towards the old storehouse. After that, no certain trace of her is found. The family’s search, administrative notices and Rasbihari’s attendance register establish facts only up to a point. Conflicting stories circulate: that Kusuma drowned in the river, fled, was imprisoned in the mansion, or eloped with her lover. A red shawl and the sound of anklets become mysterious emblems of remembrance. The novel offers no definitive solution to this historical disappearance.

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Chapter 18 — Inside the Wall

Overview of the Story

The story returns to the present. Madhavi again hears the tinkling of anklets, and the search begins in the old mansion’s “Bride’s Room.” With the family’s permission and witnesses present, investigators examine the earthquake repairs, the ventilator and the wall’s older layers. Specialists cautiously open a hollow space in the wall and find half of an old letter and a trace of blue thread. The materials are secured and sent for examination. Air moving past old ironwork is also considered a possible explanation for the ringing sound. Amid the rational investigation, Kusuma’s unfinished story comes alive again.

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Chapter 19 — Two Lines on a Palm

Overview of the Story

After the discovery of the thread and letter in the mansion, Madhavi reflects on her palm and her dreams. She visits Ambika Kaki, where they discuss experience, palmistry, human observation and the meaning of modern data. Kaki argues that it is equally wrong to dismiss long experience as magic or to regard a computer as incapable of error. Light teasing and growing affection also develop between Madhavi and Abhiram. Meanwhile, Sutra combines records of bank withdrawals, telephones and locations across the river and labels Dulari a “primary suspect.” The cheerful mood turns back to apprehension.

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Chapter 20 — Sutra’s First Mistake

Overview of the Story

Independent verification gives new meanings to the main grounds on which Sutra suspected Dulari: repeated cash withdrawals, a shared telephone, a payment from an unfamiliar account and her absence. The cash was withdrawn for her family’s medicines and necessities; the telephone number served several households; and the payment of twelve hundred rupees was travel expenses from a legal-aid committee. Abhiram acknowledges that data stripped of context can unjustly make poor people’s lives look suspicious. Vasudha’s note about Dulari, saying something like “Contact is not safe,” points to danger. Madhavi then receives a seven-second voice message: “I have not run away.” It becomes an important sign that Dulari is alive.

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Chapter 21 — Dulari’s Voice

Overview of the Story

Madhavi believes the seven-second recording is Dulari’s voice, but Jaynarayan distinguishes recognition from legally adequate authentication. Telecommunications analysis connects the message to a tower area across the river, without identifying any particular village or house. The investigators decide to travel towards Baraila-Diyara, aided by local geographical knowledge and boatmen. Dulari’s mother wants Madhavi to accompany them so her daughter will not hide at the sight of the police. Jaynarayan, Madhavi, Abhiram, a policewoman and Bhola Sahni set out in a boat. In this chapter the abstract suspicion surrounding a disappearance becomes a search with a definite geographical direction.

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Chapter 22 — A Night in the Boat

Overview of the Story

During the river crossing, stormy rain and a powerful current place the boat in danger. At several moments the local experience of the boatman Bhola Sahni proves more useful than a mechanical map. The party spends the night in a temporary shelter, questions people living on the river islands and gathers indications of Dulari’s possible route. Mutual support amid danger brings Madhavi and Abhiram closer; each also recognises the limits of the other’s knowledge. Rather than proceed farther onto the sandy river tract without adequate information, the party finally returns to town. Dulari has not been found, but the geographical range of the search is clearer.

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Chapter 23 — Not an Astrologer, but a Keeper of Memories

Overview of the Story

Ambika Kaki shows her personal registers to the investigators. More important than astrological details at birth, these records preserve memories of migration, marriage, debt, floods and displacement. The old settlements of the families of Seven Hamlets appear within different networks of relationships, suggesting ways to fill gaps in official records. Kaki emerges not merely as someone who predicts the future, but as a custodian of local history. Madhavi and Abhiram understand that oral memory can be a valuable source, although it still requires verification. The discovery also matters because Vasudha had been searching for this history before her death.

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Chapter 24 — Anklets at Midnight

Overview of the Story

Comparing old and recent photographs of the mansion, Madhavi identifies a section of wall where newer lime plaster has covered an earlier inscription. At night she again experiences the sound of anklets, but does not turn it into independent evidence. At the next inspection, experts use angled lighting and photography to bring out the writing without removing the plaster. The words seem to include Kusuma’s name and a sentence like “I was here.” The inscription may be a historical indication of Kusuma’s presence, but when it was written, and by whom, remains unknown. The difference between dream and document is preserved in the narrative.

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Chapter 25 — Dulari Is Found

Overview of the Story

Local boatmen report a young woman resembling Dulari. Madhavi, a woman police officer and the investigation team travel to a river island, where they find her alive in Phulmati’s shelter. Dulari explains that she did not return home after seeing someone burning papers, fearing that she herself would be accused. She has protected a shadow copy connected with Vasudha inside oiled paper and asks that its voluntary handover be formally recorded. Her distrust grows out of her social experience: she was afraid that the police would not believe the word of a poor woman. On her return to town, she asks whether she is a witness or an accused person.

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Chapter 26 — The Arrest

Overview of the Story

At the police station, Dulari demands the right to read and verify her statement before accepting it, and hands over the protected shadow copy. Nevertheless, the police arrest her on the grounds that she was among Vasudha’s last visitors, had been missing, retained the copy and was named in Sutra’s first report. Legal-aid lawyer Rachna Mandal arrives and questions the basis for the arrest, the revised analysis and Dulari’s rights. Despite her voluntary cooperation, Dulari is taken into custody. Jaynarayan and Abhiram realise that even after a technical error has been corrected, the original faulty finding can remain alive in administrative records.

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Chapter 27 — The Bail Hearing

Overview of the Story

At the sessions court, Rachna Mandal presents a carefully organised argument for Dulari's bail. She explains the shared telephone, the withdrawals for medicine, the legal-aid payment and Dulari's voluntary delivery of the shadow copy. The prosecution seeks custody, citing her disappearance and her last meeting with Vasudha. The defence emphasises Sutra's revised version and the absence of the original records. Judge Ira Sinha grants bail subject to cooperation with the investigation and other conditions, and orders that every version of the system's reports be preserved. Dulari is released, but the question of guilt or innocence has not yet been finally settled.

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Chapter 28 — Who Owns the Evidence?

Overview of the Story

After the bail hearing, the central question before the court becomes: who is responsible for Sutra’s conclusions? Abhiram sets out the original and amended reports, the data sources, the incorrect classifications and the limits of confidence. The court rules that technical analysis is not an independent eyewitness. To be used, it requires original sources, a documented chain of custody, a transparent calculation method and human responsibility open to cross-examination. The basis of the machine-generated suspicion against Dulari weakens. After the hearing, Kamli Devi remembers a familiar customer who took tea with two spoonfuls of sugar at 4:10 in the morning. The recollection offers a new lead seven minutes before the clock

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Chapter 28 — Who Owns the Evidence?

Overview of the Story

2 / 2

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Chapter 29 — Kamli Devi’s Four-O’Clock Tea

Overview of the Story

Kamli Devi estimates the early-morning time from her stove, milk delivery and habitual routine. She gives a formal statement concerning a familiar tea customer, although the person’s identity is not immediately established. A mechanical examination shows that the clock could have stopped after a violent jolt; medical testing finds no decisive evidence of poisoning that would establish suicide. Using a model of the air duct and bolt, an experiment demonstrates the possibility of fastening the door from a distance. The sweetened dawn tea, stopped clock, burnt paper and missing copy begin to fit together, but mere proximity in time does not establish anyone’s guilt.

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Chapter 30 — A Staged Suicide

Overview of the Story

The police apply to the court to reconsider the original presumption that Vasudha died by suicide. Five kinds of discrepancies in her habits, the two cups, an injury, the clock, ashes, the shadow copy and the possible mechanical operation of the bolt strengthen the suspicion that the scene was deliberately altered. The court authorises broader investigation into possible violent death and manipulation of evidence. Jaynarayan warns that the staged scene may have had more than one author: the person familiar with Vasudha's habits and the person who knew the building's old air duct might be different individuals. The easy account of suicide is formally dismantled.

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Chapter 31 — Jaynarayan’s Bias

Overview of the Story

When first asked to identify the tea customer, Kamli Devi selects a photograph of Vasudha’s husband Arun. But the timeline, a doctor’s visit and a video telephone conversation make it extremely unlikely that Arun was at the courthouse around four in the morning. Jaynarayan admits that memories of an older investigation concerning Chandrakala—in which he failed to expose a husband’s lie in time—have biased him against Arun. He explicitly records his confirmation bias. The need to acknowledge uncertainty in human recollection and eyewitness identification becomes apparent. Meanwhile, the name “Rasbihari” in an old record stirs Abhiram’s suspicion that the history may concern his own family.

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Chapter 32 — The Papers in Abhiram's House

Overview of the Story

In an old chest at home, Abhiram finds a 1935 application for a replacement copy bearing Rasbihari's name, together with a copy from the 1950s. The papers contain an ancestor's signature, a red-pencil annotation and information about the boundaries of Seven Hamlets. They could help Vasudha's research substantially, but Abhiram is held back by fear that his family will be accused. He first makes images of the papers without immediately sharing the full information with Madhavi or the investigation team. He persuades himself that private fear is merely proper caution about verifying a source. His silence creates problems for both affection and professional integrity.

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Chapter 33 — A Fracture in Affection

Overview of the Story

Madhavi learns about the papers found at Abhiram's home and his silence. She is hurt because he assumed in advance that she would consider him guilty on hearing his family's name. Their mutual trust fractures. Jaynarayan regards withholding a source as an investigative error, while recognising Abhiram's fear as a separate human difficulty. Eventually the original papers are formally handed over, with their provenance and their status as unverified materials explicitly recorded. Correlating maps from different years, Sutra finds preliminary indications that the boundary has shifted consistently in one direction. The technical work advances, but personal trust does not return immediately.

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Chapter 34 — Sutra’s New Map

Overview of the Story

With the new sources added, Sutra compares boundary maps from 1934, 1941, 1957 and the present. Allowing for ponds, temples, fixed landmarks and differences caused by paper shrinkage, the progressive movement of the Seven Hamlets boundary appears to run in a single direction; much of the land seems to have been incorporated into neighbouring estate property. The government register contains an annotation reading “boundary correction,” but many pages lack evidence of lawful inspection and representatives’ signatures. Field verification tests the technical visualisation. The mark of seven dots inside a circle reappears on an old copy. The inquiry is now seeking the actual process by which records changed, rather than declaring

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Chapter 34 — Sutra’s New Map

Overview of the Story

someone guilty.

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Chapter 35 — Rahmat Kaka’s Knot

Overview of the Story

Rahmat Kaka, a binder of old books, examines the physical construction of the blue thread and the entries in a repair register. He warns that the thread’s colour cannot establish anyone’s identity. An old work slip calls the blue thread “the young woman’s private mark,” possibly Kusuma’s, rather than an official seal. Rahmat Kaka suggests that part of the torn letter may have been preserved inside the binding of the 1935 filing register. His bookbinding experience becomes a fresh source for recovering forgotten history. Some conversation between Madhavi and Abhiram becomes possible again, although the breach of trust is not yet fully healed.

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Chapter 36 — The True Meaning of “The Seventh Witness”

Overview of the Story

Another fragment of paper is found inside the binding of the district archive’s 1935 filing register; its edge matches the half-letter recovered from the mansion. The preliminary reading establishes the historical meaning of “the seventh witness”: it was the seventh authentication mark on the Seven Hamlets land document, an old sign of acceptance on the estate paper, not the name of any identifiable person. The seven dots within a circle helped authenticate copies, whereas the blue thread was Kusuma’s personal mark. Sutra’s earlier classification is revised. Yet the final question in the letter—“In which register shall we place the one who sees but does not speak a name?”—leaves a further, unresolved meaning.

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Chapter 37 — The Family Circle Breaks

Overview of the Story

Documents emerge showing the debts of Vasudha’s brother Prakhar, his business payments and his financial connections with the landholding group. Family statements attempt to establish his whereabouts that night, but comparison of sources reveals numerous gaps. A confidential message Madhavi had earlier seen on his phone turns out to concern Vijay Mallik, a broker for the land group. Re-examination of Kamli Devi’s identification of the early-morning tea customer points towards Prakhar, though it is not conclusive proof. Prakhar’s second telephone reveals contacts during the night and at dawn with Navalkishor Jha, a senior records assistant. The investigation now centres on the relationship between Prakhar and the records official.

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Chapter 38 — Four Seventeen

Overview of the Story

When records, statements and physical tests are brought together, the decisive sequence of events emerges. Under pressure from debts owed to the landholding group, Prakhar comes to the records room at dawn to prevent Vasudha from obtaining a copy. During an argument with his sister, he violently pushes her; her head strikes a hard corner of a cupboard, and the clock stops at 4:17. Instead of calling medical assistance, Prakhar summons Navalkishor. Navalkishor burns documents, rearranges the desk and fastens the bolt through the old air duct, creating the illusion of a locked room. Dulari had already saved a shadow copy during the night. The investigation separately records the incident, the violence, the failure to summon help

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Chapter 38 — Four Seventeen

Overview of the Story

2 / 2

and the destruction of evidence, leaving the final legal determination of responsibility to the court.

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Chapter 39 — Through Dulari’s Eyes

Overview of the Story

Returning to give a statement, Dulari asks explicitly whether she is an accused person or a witness. In a lawful identification procedure, she describes only what she actually saw: the flame of burning papers, one person’s manner of walking and the gleam of a key. She does not claim to have witnessed the killing. She explains that she went to Phulmati’s house across the river to protect the shadow copy and escape social prejudice and threats from the land group. The police make separate applications for charges against Prakhar and Navalkishor. Suspicion begins to lift from Dulari’s name. The ethical value of truthful testimony, even when limited in scope, comes to the foreground.

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Chapter 40 — The Final Arguments

Overview of the Story

Eight months later, the court hears the final arguments against Prakhar and Navalkishor. The prosecution combines evidence of financial interest, the violent push, failure to call medical help, the burning of documents and alteration of the scene; the defence challenges the limitations of each source. Judge Ira Sinha finds that premeditated murder has not been sufficiently established, but convicts Prakhar of the violent act that caused the death and of conspiracy to destroy evidence. Navalkishor is convicted of destroying evidence, tampering with records and misleading the investigation. Suspicion against Dulari is removed entirely. The court makes clear that Sutra is not an independent witness: judicial decisions must rest on

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Chapter 40 — The Final Arguments

Overview of the Story

verified sources and human accountability.

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Chapter 41 — The Land Regains Its Name

Overview of the Story

Even after judgment in the criminal case, the families of Seven Hamlets do not automatically recover their land. Rachna Mandal seeks interim protection in the civil court because the chain of government copies shows evidence of tampering and displacement might cause irreparable harm. Under court supervision, a fresh boundary survey begins, comparing old receipts, the families' settlement history, use of the pond and local testimony. Sutra's map is characterised as an aid to visualisation, not a legally authoritative survey. The meanings of rights connected with soil, school, hearth and memory become visible. Final ownership remains undecided, but the names of Seven Hamlets begin returning to both public records and public speech.

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Chapter 42 — Where Reason Comes to Rest

Overview of the Story

1 / 2

The criminal proceedings have ended, the land case continues, and the mansion has become a protected archival site. During an official inspection, an intact letter tied with blue thread is found in a sealed room. Its full text matches the historical letter previously discovered in two separately secured fragments. The seals on the original fragments remain intact, and the camera logs show no immediately obvious unauthorised entry; none of this, however, resolves the mystery. The origin of the new letter, the age of its paper and the means by which it was placed there remain unknown. Madhavi refuses to treat her dream as evidence; Abhiram accepts the duty of recording the unknown as unknown; and Jaynarayan describes silence as

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Chapter 42 — Where Reason Comes to Rest

Overview of the Story

2 / 2

part of intelligence. The novel ends without forcing an answer upon the question.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Concluding Perspective

08 · The Seventh Witness

Concluding Perspective

At the centre of this 42-chapter story lie the investigation into Vasudha’s death and the land rights of Seven Hamlets. “The Seventh Witness” signifies, on one level, the seventh authentication mark on an old document; on another, it continues to resonate as a literary image of silence, incomplete testimony and unanswered questions. Although the judicial decision, the history of landholding and personal memory intersect, the novel does not claim to settle every question definitively.

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WORK / कृति

09 · Sahasrabadhani

23 Editorial Narrative Sections

SECTION / खण्ड

Brief Outline of the Story

09 · Sahasrabadhani

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Brief Outline of the Story

Jhingur → Kalit → Nand → Aruni: this succession of generations forms the spine of the story. The rivers, floods and village life of Mithila are linked in sequence with modern education, government engineering, ethical struggles, investigations of corruption, family memory, the tension between science and the unseen, and experiences of life and death.

Section 01 — Kalit’s Childhood in Jhingur’s Courtyard and the Turn Towards New Education

Brief Outline of the Story

Jhingur Thakur and his wife recall incidents from their son Kalit’s childhood. The story begins with his crawling on his knees, trying to reach a window, imitating the speech of grown-ups and provoking little bursts of laughter in the household. Amid these domestic memories comes the account of Kalit’s birth in 1885. As British rule grows more influential and English becomes necessary for government employment, Jhingur Babu does not want to restrict his son to traditional Sanskrit education. Through a Calcutta-connected gentleman and a Bengali teacher in Darbhanga, he arranges for Kalit to learn English.

Jhingur Babu is proud of the child’s prospects, but is also troubled that Kalit participates less than the other boys in the

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Section 01 — Kalit’s Childhood in Jhingur’s Courtyard and the Turn Towards New Education

Brief Outline of the Story

akhara. The family discusses the differences between honorific forms of address within the home and accepted social manners. Inwardly, the father hopes that Kalit will make an independent path between the practices of a changing age and the entanglements of the old one.

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Section 02 — The Clan Invitation, Sabhagachhi and the Changing Courses of the Balan and Kamala

Brief Outline of the Story

An affinal relative arriving from Ekaur gives Jhingur Thakur a rose-coloured letter written in the Tirhuta script. It invites him to the sacred-thread ceremonies of Gares and Chandramohan, asks that the ancestral relationship be maintained and proposes that Jhingur Babu serve as acharya. This episode brings into view ancestry, gotra, the exchange of family news and Mithila's Sabhagachhi tradition. Jhingur Babu plans to take Kalit with him to Ekaur.

Descriptions of the Balan's deep, quiet current, the Kamala's foaming floods and the formation of a new river channel connect the story to geography over a long span of time. Trees falling near Pipraghat change the course of the stream; sand accumulates in the Kamala, and the

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Section 02 — The Clan Invitation, Sabhagachhi and the Changing Courses of the Balan and Kamala

Brief Outline of the Story

Sabhagachhi at Partapur falls into ruin. Through this altered landscape the father and son reach Ekaur, where scholarly debate, history and community meetings proceed together.

Section 03 — The Assembly at Ekaur, Kalit’s Marriage and His Early Service in Katihar

Brief Outline of the Story

At Ekaur, discussion among learned people touches upon British government, military campaigns, Mangaru Babu’s memories of war and the Congress. In this setting, Fannu Babu of Raje village asks about Kalit. Learning of Kalit’s English education and his prospective work collecting revenue in Katihar, he considers a marriage alliance for his daughter. With the mediation of kinsmen, the match is settled quickly.

Descriptions of the mahfa palanquin, the kaṭahi cart, the wedding procession on foot, the parichhan welcoming ritual, songs, philosophical debates and ceremonies continuing through the night evoke the social world of the marriage. Afterwards Kalit goes to Katihar. In the difficult environment of the Kosi region, he learns

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Section 03 — The Assembly at Ekaur, Kalit’s Marriage and His Early Service in Katihar

Brief Outline of the Story

revenue collection, earns respect and tries to reform corrupt practices in the collection of dues. Meanwhile, his mother dies. The first great shadow of family bereavement falls behind the celebrations of marriage.

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Section 04 — Jhingur’s Death, Buchiya’s Wedding and a Brother’s Responsibility

Brief Outline of the Story

In the third year after Kalit’s gauna—the ceremony marking his wife’s coming to live with him—Jhingur Thakur senses that his death is near and entrusts his daughter Buchiya to his son’s care. The loss of his wife has broken him inwardly. He cannot accept the request that he leave his home village to live with his son. After Jhingur’s death, the full weight of family decisions falls upon Kalit, who no longer has his father’s support.

Following the annual memorial observance for his father and a village feast, Kalit begins looking for a suitable husband for Buchiya. When the Sabhagachhi at Partapur yields no satisfactory match, he chooses a suitable young man from a distant place, drawing on connections in Gidhaur and the Barh

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Section 04 — Jhingur’s Death, Buchiya’s Wedding and a Brother’s Responsibility

region. The speed of his decision recalls the way Jhingur himself settled matters. Buchiya is duly married. Affection between sister-in-law and husband’s sister, waiting for the gauna and anxiety about a marital home far across the Ganga show a household undergoing change.

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Section 05 — The Earthquake of 1934, a New Homestead and Death’s Shadow over Kalit’s Family

Brief Outline of the Story

Over time Kalit’s household grows to include his wife, daughters and sons. When the earthquake of 1934 brings down the house, the family must spend the night beside Mahadev Pond. As aftershocks continue, they stay in Katihar for several days, then abandon the old village homestead and establish a new house near the flower garden. In this way, a natural disaster alters both the family’s location and the arrangement of its life.

The daughters marry, but the eldest dies in childbirth; her little daughter later dies as well, after abdominal pain. Cholera, plague and news of deaths in the village remain a constant presence. Kalit’s standing rises in Katihar, while his two sons begin their studies. The younger, Nand, turns towards

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Section 05 — The Earthquake of 1934, a New Homestead and Death’s Shadow over Kalit’s Family

Brief Outline of the Story

mathematics and science but also believes in invisible powers. One day Kalit suddenly falls and dies; Nand witnesses his unexpected death with his own eyes.

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Section 06 — Nand’s Education: Fear, Mathematics and the Journey to Becoming an Engineer

Brief Outline of the Story

After his father’s death, Nand studies and grows up under the care of his mother, Yashoda. Fragments of a cobra’s body and an incident involving a mongoose keeping watch near children’s heads become part of family memory. Property is divided in a family partition, but Nand does not give up his studies. Supported by a scholarship, he studies science, including mathematics, at R. K. College, Madhubani. At first the subjects seem difficult; rote exercises gradually give way to understanding, and he earns a first division.

In 1959 he goes to the Muzaffarpur Institute of Technology to study civil engineering. The change from dhoti and kurta to trousers and shirt reveals a clash between a modern technical institution and rural

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Section 06 — Nand’s Education: Fear, Mathematics and the Journey to Becoming an Engineer

Brief Outline of the Story

upbringing. He marries on the condition that his father-in-law will pay for his education, although living expenses for the holiday months are deducted. By 1963 Nand has completed his studies and entered government engineering service; from 1964 onwards he serves as an assistant engineer.

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Section 07 — National Feeling, Public Service and Nand’s Firm Principles

Brief Outline of the Story

1 / 2

Nand remembers both the celebrations of 15 August 1947 and the disillusionment caused by the Chinese attack of 1962. During the war of 1965, he applies to serve in the army as an engineering officer but is rejected on grounds of body weight. Engineering appointments in different regions bring him close to rural labouring and Adivasi communities. In development work at Dehri-on-Sone, seeking local cooperation, giving labourers opportunities and refusing illicit earnings become characteristic of his conduct.

During an attack of asthma, a local healer’s herbal remedy gives him relief, drawing his interest to traditional treatments outside modern medicine. Friends affectionately call him “Bholenath.” His wish to build a brick house

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Section 07 — National Feeling, Public Service and Nand’s Firm Principles

Brief Outline of the Story

in his native village, and the new habit of addressing his wife directly, indicate changes in his domestic life. Gradually his ideals of public service begin to collide with the system.

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Section 08 — The Loss of Ba, Efforts at Irrigation and the Kamala–Balan Crisis

Brief Outline of the Story

Nand’s family of children grows, but the premature death of his nephew Navin brings deep grief. While training in Delhi, Nand dreams of something resembling the nephew’s death; when he reaches the village and believes the event has happened as dreamed, his confidence in invisible powers grows. Meanwhile, his mother, whom the children call “Ba,” suffers from an abdominal illness. Treatment reveals cancer, and she dies in Patna. Memories of Ba remain alive in the household of her grandchildren.

Nand has a borewell drilled in a dry field, but no groundwater is found. Later he tries to have a government borewell installed at a suitable site. The changing channels of the Kamala–Balan, deposits of sand, altered crop yields, ponds and

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Section 08 — The Loss of Ba, Efforts at Irrigation and the Kamala–Balan Crisis

Brief Outline of the Story

drainage streams, rice transplanting and accounts of older village disputes turn this family story into a history of the rural environment.

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Section 09 — Aruni’s Birth, Nightmares and the Curiosity of a Child’s Mind

Brief Outline of the Story

At the time of the birth of Nand’s younger son Aruni, the family first receives incorrect news that a daughter has been born; a few days later the truth becomes clear. The incident raises in Aruni’s consciousness questions about the shifting outward appearances of truth. Through stories of Ba, who died before he was born, he begins to learn of his family’s unseen past. As a child he has frightening dreams at night: the sensation of falling from the edge of a roof, an unknown pull of nature and questions about birth and death settle in his mind.

His father, Nand, recounts having dreamed as a boy of a terrifying, dishevelled, fire-breathing figure called “Sahasrabadhani,” whose arrival in folklore is linked with calamity and

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Section 09 — Aruni’s Birth, Nightmares and the Curiosity of a Child’s Mind

Brief Outline of the Story

2 / 2

famine. Aruni tries to understand when sleep comes and how awareness of a dream takes shape. His interest in letters, numerals, Sanskrit verses and numerical sequences provides the earliest signs of his questioning intelligence.

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Section 10 — 1976: The Ganga Bridge Colony and Aruni's Diary

Brief Outline of the Story

In his diary Aruni regards 1976 as a decisive dividing line in his life. Living with his parents and siblings in the colony of the Ganga Bridge project at Hajipur, he sees his father serving both as a government engineer and as a practitioner of homeopathy. Part of Nand's home remains open to patients. The building of a new school for the colony's children offers a picture of education organised by the community.

Aruni examines the boundaries between fact, imagination and experience in his recollections. Games, questions, school, scientific curiosity and a classmate's diary help shape the storyteller within him. He also reads a narrative written by an acquaintance about a boy's imagined accident and long recovery. This written

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Section 10 — 1976: The Ganga Bridge Colony and Aruni’s Diary

Brief Outline of the Story

memory later seems to correspond in a startling way to the accident and recovery in Aruni’s own life. In this passage, the child’s perspective and the memory of the future echo one another.

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Section 11 — A Year and a Half in the Village: Play, Social Awareness and Children’s Theatre

Brief Outline of the Story

During his stay in the village, Aruni’s memories bring together the playing field, quarrels between younger and older groups, folk songs, dramas and school cultural competitions. Seeing the difficulties of a vendor who earns his living selling red sticks and the struggles of labourers’ families raises questions about poverty and social inequality in his young mind. An incident in which his father kicks away a suitcase offered as a bribe becomes part of Aruni’s earliest lessons about integrity.

He formulates his own arguments about victory, defeat, friendship and collective competition. Inspired by his enthusiasm for watching Ramlila and other plays in the village, he prepares a children’s production of “Danavir Dadhichi.” The

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Section 11 — A Year and a Half in the Village: Play, Social Awareness and Children’s Theatre

Brief Outline of the Story

teacher’s absence, disturbances caused by older boys and disorder on stage all become part of the experience. Amid schoolwork, village companionship and conflicts, Aruni writes his record of memories. Later Nand discovers his son’s diary and advises him to concentrate on his studies.

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Section 12 — Return to Patna, Family Life and the Ganga Bridge Dispute

Brief Outline of the Story

After the period in the village, the family returns to Patna. At his elder brother’s urging, Nand tries to move away from on-site construction work on the Ganga Bridge and obtain an office assignment. Living an ordinary family life, attending to the children’s studies and running a settled household do not come easily to him. In Patna, conversations between father and son about the name of the zoo and the distinction between a botanical garden and a biological park further encourage Aruni’s curiosity.

Irregularities in the construction of the Ganga Bridge cause Nand profound distress. The narrative records his experiences and allegations concerning weak supports, cracks, demolition at night and the accidental deaths of

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Section 12 — Return to Patna, Family Life and the Ganga Bridge Dispute

Brief Outline of the Story

labourers. His opposition to corruption affects his salary, postings and social relationships. A discussion of invisible waves through the radio and transistor also sets up a tension between science and Nand’s attraction to the unseen world.

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Section 13 — Meeting Shobha Babu Again and Nand’s Moral Wound

Brief Outline of the Story

After many years, Nand meets Shobha Babu of Kachhabi village in Patna. Shobha Babu is the brother-in-law of Nand’s deceased elder sister. They speak emotionally about the abolition of zamindari, their family’s financial decline, the struggle to become self-reliant through a tea-and-betel stall and the breakdown of old relationships. This meeting again reminds Nand of his sister and of the death of his niece at an early age.

After the bridge’s inauguration, Nand’s anguish intensifies. According to him, the names of many labourers killed in accidents do not appear on the memorial, whereas engineers have received awards. He regards this injustice as a sign that his struggle has remained unfinished. His elder brother advises him not

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Section 13 — Meeting Shobha Babu Again and Nand’s Moral Wound

Brief Outline of the Story

to make the children pay for this suffering. Yet a sense of defeat weighs heavily on Nand’s inner life. He becomes increasingly attracted to astrology, gemstones and tantric remedies.

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Section 14 — Nand’s Spiritual Confusion, Sudden Death and Funeral Rites

Brief Outline of the Story

After the struggle over construction of the bridge, Nand’s older routines of regular study, family companionship and visits to the village are disturbed. Religious observances, tantric beliefs and contact on religious matters with distant relatives become more frequent. One small moment of happiness near the end of his life involves watching the Mahabharata on a television brought home by his son. One Sunday, after watching the programme, Nand lies down to rest. Aruni’s mother tries to offer Nand tea, but he does not wake. A doctor declares him dead.

Remembering his father’s attachment to the village, Aruni decides to take the body from Patna to the village. As they cross the Ganga Bridge, memories of the brief list of

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Section 14 — Nand’s Spiritual Confusion, Sudden Death and Funeral Rites

Brief Outline of the Story

2 / 2

labourers’ names, the childhood colony and his father’s writings about his suffering return. The cremation takes place in the village’s Kalam grove. Amid the shraddha rites and readings from the Garuda Purana, Aruni sees death, social customs and his father’s ethical life in a new light.

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Section 15 — Aruni’s Self-Examination After Bereavement and the Road to Employment

Brief Outline of the Story

After Nand’s death, memory and the present repeatedly enter one another in Aruni’s story. Looking back on the past while unwell in an apartment in Calcutta, Aruni reassesses his family’s expectations, his mother’s affection, the household’s financial insecurity and his father’s ethical struggle, which had come to be regarded as unsuccessful. At this point the narrative acquires the tone of autobiographical reflection more strongly than that of family history.

When choosing a course of study, Aruni goes against his father’s wishes and takes arts rather than science. There follows an account of his sitting various competitive examinations and joining a uniformed Group B service of the central government. His father had been

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Section 15 — Aruni’s Self-Examination After Bereavement and the Road to Employment

Brief Outline of the Story

2 / 2

unhappy with his business inclinations but had derived some satisfaction from his government employment. After the funeral observances, Aruni feels that his father is now absent, yet the ethical responsibility associated with his path has not ended.

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Section 16 — The Bus Journey of November 1995: Rediscovering His Father Through Azam Sahib

Brief Outline of the Story

In November 1995, after his father’s shraddha, Aruni, with his head shaved, boards a bus from Darbhanga to Patna. A fellow passenger keeps boasting of his house, position, children and achievements. At first Aruni remains quiet. As the bus approaches the Ganga Bridge Colony, the conversation turns to the childhood school and home. On hearing that Aruni’s father was named Nand Thakur, the passenger introduces himself as “I. A. Azam” and recalls their old acquaintance. His son Nehal had been Aruni’s classmate.

Azam Sahib recounts from personal experience Nand’s free homeopathic service, an incident in which he helped cure a sick child, his sympathy for labourers and his refusal to accept bribes. Aruni sees on the bridge the list

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Section 16 — The Bus Journey of November 1995: Rediscovering His Father Through Azam Sahib

Brief Outline of the Story

bearing so few labourers’ names. His father’s life, which had seemed incomplete amid the household’s everyday tensions, becomes present again, honoured in the memory of another person.

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Section 17 — The Cost of His Father’s Honesty, Fear and Insecurity at Home

Brief Outline of the Story

1 / 2

After the bus journey, Aruni looks for a new rented house in Patna and reconsiders many of the tensions of the past. Nand’s refusal to accept bribes had increased the family’s financial difficulties, but the household had not been of one mind about it. Aruni’s mother worried about household expenses, the children’s futures and showing proper hospitality to guests, while his father grew increasingly uncompromising about principles. The children were continually troubled by the question of what would happen to the family if something happened to their father.

Aruni also recalls a day when, returning from school, he heard news of a road accident and assumed that his father had died. He later learned that the person killed belonged

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Section 17 — The Cost of His Father's Honesty, Fear and Insecurity at Home

Brief Outline of the Story

2 / 2

to another family. The experience of feeling his own relief while confronting another family's grief disturbed him. After his father's death, the family changes rented houses, his mother is brought back to Patna, and Aruni returns to his place of duty.

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Section 18 — The Raid on Swarna Ply and Aruni’s First Investigative Setback

Brief Outline of the Story

While engaged in government intelligence and vigilance work, Aruni receives information about tax evasion by a plywood company called Swarna Ply. With the necessary permission, raids are conducted at its factory, residence and dealers’ premises, but no solid proof is found. The prominent businessman complains of humiliation and commercial losses; officers within the department question Aruni’s decision. Aruni recognises the danger of finding someone guilty without evidence, but does not immediately close the matter.

He begins a fresh examination of documents and the relative figures for production, supply and tax payments. A plan is made to trace the supply chain beyond the principal company. Instead of abandoning the case for

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Section 18 — The Raid on Swarna Ply and Aruni’s First Investigative Setback

Brief Outline of the Story

his own protection after the first failure, he decides to pursue a deeper investigation. The narrative here moves from family memory to the absorbing terrain of evidence gathering and administrative struggle.

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Section 19 — Naval of Araria, Confidential Information and Unequal Commercial Arrangements

Brief Outline of the Story

During the investigation, Aruni reaches a plywood factory in the Araria region. Gathering information at a tea-and-betel shop, he visits an associated factory and meets a young businessman named Naval. Because of a local shutdown and violence, Naval accommodates him in his guesthouse. Their conversations touch on extortion, political pressure, the costs imposed by the police and administration and the business community's supposed "adjustments." Naval claims that he does not commit direct tax evasion, but rather makes practical compromises under pressure from circumstances.

After a telephone call during the night, Naval's manner changes. The next morning he reveals that Aruni is a vigilance officer and explains that information

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Section 19 — Naval of Araria, Confidential Information and Unequal Commercial Arrangements

Brief Outline of the Story

about Aruni’s journey had reached him from the main company’s office. It becomes clear that the confidentiality of the investigation has been breached. Back in Calcutta, Aruni begins a more painstaking search through the company’s transactions and police records.

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Section 20 — The Stolen Diary, the Tax Fraud Revelation and Naval’s Suspicious Death

Brief Outline of the Story

Having found no direct proof against the company, Aruni maintains contact with the police station. About six months later, news arrives from the Salt Lake police station of a complaint about the theft of a suitcase. The complaint mentions Rs 1.79 lakh in cash and cheques worth Rs 1.83 lakh. Entries for cash and cheques in a diary found during the raid are compared with the returns of the Araria factory. It emerges that roughly half of the value of many transactions had been paid in cash, outside the regular accounts and tax returns.

On the basis of the diary, Aruni submits a report to the director, and a notice alleging tax irregularities amounting to crores of rupees is issued against Swarna Ply. At this point comes news that

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Section 20 — The Stolen Diary, the Tax Fraud Revelation and Naval’s Suspicious Death

Brief Outline of the Story

Naval has died in a road accident. Characters voice suspicions about whether it was an accident or a possible conspiracy, but murder is not established. Aruni considers what unintended ethical connection his investigation might have to Naval’s death.

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Section 21 — Shashank’s Conspiracy, Overseas Calls and Aruni’s Self-Defence

Brief Outline of the Story

1 / 2

After his success in the business investigation, some colleagues become displeased with decisions about Aruni’s appointment and posting. An officer named Shashank tries to manipulate the arrangements in favour of his own people. Allegations arise that calls to Abu Dhabi and Dubai were made from Aruni’s office telephone, although the telephone is said to have been out of order at the time. International dialling had been activated without Aruni’s knowledge. Amid complaints and an inquiry, Aruni is transferred; Shashank’s group regards the event as Aruni’s defeat.

Aruni draws a lesson from his father’s experiences. With his friend Manindra’s help, he has the call lists, complaints and alleged overseas contacts examined in

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Section 21 — Shashank’s Conspiracy, Overseas Calls and Aruni’s Self-Defence

Brief Outline of the Story

sequence. Although the direct records are limited, analysis of the available numbers exposes weaknesses in the allegation, and Aruni is cleared by the departmental inquiry. This victory emerges not as a repetition of his father’s unfinished struggle, but as a different strategic response to it.

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Section 22 — The Information Technology Branch in Delhi and Shashank’s Exposure

Brief Outline of the Story

1 / 2

Aruni accepts a posting in the information technology branch of the vigilance department in Delhi. Others regard it as a neglected assignment, but he devotes himself to computer studies, improving facilities for employees and using new technical equipment. A system for recording telephone conversations is introduced in the department. A newspaper publishes information about Shashank’s connection with a smuggler, and an inquiry is ordered by the minister.

At the inquiry meeting, Aruni presents the dates and sequence of short recorded telephone conversations. The chain—Shashank’s request to meet the smuggler, his subsequent summoning of the smuggler’s employee at night, and the unsuccessful raid the following morning—gives

Section 22 — The Information Technology Branch in Delhi and Shashank’s Exposure

substance to the suspicion that details of the raid were leaked. Investigating officers take the evidence through the next procedural stages. Shashank is offered a choice between compulsory retirement and further inquiry; he accepts retirement. Manindra links Aruni’s patient strategy with respect for his father.

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Section 23 — The Accident, Recovery and the Final Echo of Sahasrabadhani

Brief Outline of the Story

After the Shashank affair ends, Aruni’s life takes another unexpected turn. Following an official journey, he is badly injured in a severe accident. He spends fifteen days on a ventilator and almost a year walking with crutches. Amid repeated operations and a prolonged recovery, the imagined accident in the old diary again seems to correspond to real life. Aruni examines his experience of lost time, the weakening of social relationships, physical helplessness and his own mental resilience.

As he emerges from anaesthesia, he feels that the dishevelled Sahasrabadhani has seized and hurled him back into the world. The terrifying figure of his childhood dream thus reappears at the boundary between life and death. After a year and a

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Section 23 — The Accident, Recovery and the Final Echo of Sahasrabadhani

Brief Outline of the Story

2 / 2

half, he returns to the office, keeping his old smile. People compare the accident with Naval’s and voice suspicions, but the story provides no conclusive evidence of a conspiracy. The narrative ends with the will to remain alive, memory and uncertainty.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Story Synopsis

09 · Sahasrabadhani

Overall Story Synopsis

Through interconnected memories spanning more than three generations, Sahasrabadhani portrays the social and cultural transformation of Mithila. Beginning with Jhingur’s domestic world and Kalit’s English education, the story proceeds through Nand’s government service and the ethical crisis surrounding construction of the Ganga Bridge to Aruni’s struggles within the administration. Aspirations for life and experiences of death recur across the three generations. Despite Aruni’s investigative successes, his accident shows that the conflict between fate, social violence and human effort has not ended. The Sahasrabadhani of childhood returns as a dream-image at the close, leaving readers with questions about memory, fear and the

Overall Story Synopsis

renewal of life.

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WORK / कृति

10 · Sahasra Shirsha: A Thousand Heads

34 Kallols · Narrative Synopses

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SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Narrative Thread

10 · Sahasra Shirsha: A Thousand Heads

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Overall Narrative Thread

The principal strands of this novel are the life of Mukhdev Ram, born in the leatherworkers' quarter of Garh Narikel; his friendship with Jageshwar Jha; the childhood and marriage of his sister Mamtod; local crafts and folk songs; the violence of the struggle for independence; lengthy imprisonment; and the changing political economy of independent India. Disputes over rivers, floods, embankments and displacement connect these strands across generations. In the final kallol, a new generation from the village is making its way to Delhi, while the voice of the elderly folk singer Mohan Gabaiyya continues to flow through collective memory.

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Kallol 01 — Garh Narikel: The Village of the Mahisbar Brahmins

Overall Narrative Thread

The novel begins with the morning bustle of Garh Narikel village, the rhythm of work, and the family of Mukhdev Ram. Through the affectionate childhood shared by Mukhdev, Dayaram and their sister Mamtod, the narrative portrays a culture of labour associated with bamboo, clay, leather, drums, wind instruments, ponds and fields. The leatherworkers' quarter is largely self-reliant in its livelihood, yet a social distance from other neighbourhoods stands like an invisible wall.

The narrator offers a detailed introduction to the village ponds, the Kamala-Balan and Kosi rivers, farming, caste-based occupations, and festivals. Stories of Lala Maharaj, Chhechhanmal, Lukesari, Dulra Dayal and numerous local deities form part of the

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Kallol 01 — Garh Narikel: The Village of the Mahisbar Brahmins

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

village's memory. Amid this wealth of detail, both the mutual dependence of the village communities and their unequal standing become visible. Mukhdev's childhood world serves as an entrance into a wider social and cultural universe.

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Kallol 02 — What Are You Weaving? The East and West Winds

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

In the first movement of this kallol, beliefs about serpents and their stories intersect with the present of Mukhdev's imprisonment. Retelling the tale of Bihula and Bishahara to prison officials and fellow inmates, Mukhdev raises ironic questions about freedom, the state and administration. The exchange between remembered story and immediate circumstances alters the meaning of the guards who keep watch over the prison.

The second movement returns to Garh Narikel's thatched houses, fear of snakes, children's games and the social separation across the bamboo grove. Jageshwar Jha's friendship with Mukhdev Ram grows beyond caste boundaries. Jageshwar takes him into his own neighbourhood and the world of its orchards and ponds.

Kallol 02 — What Are You Weaving? The East and West Winds

Overall Narrative Thread

Along with the warmth of their childhood attachment, Mukhdev becomes aware of the unequal relationship between the giver and the recipient.

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Kallol 03 — How Many Observed the Sacred Fast? Dreams of Plentiful Rice

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

The kallol opens with a memory of Jageshwar's death. Mukhdev wonders why his friend's life was so short and reflects on the unequal spans of life and the coming of death through religious tales of serpents, Manasa and longevity. Accounts of famine in Mithila, verses about drought, and the memory of hunger among the poor expose the economic crisis endured by society.

Against this background, the Kamala-Balan's waters and a landlord's embankment threaten the village's survival. Mukhdev, Jageshwar, Jivach Mukhiya and other villagers consider ways to drain the floodwater. To save the village from submersion, Jageshwar and Jivach cut the embankment at night, sending water towards Piar Bachcha's fields. The villagers subsequently dig

Kallol 03 — How Many Observed the Sacred Fast? Dreams of Plentiful Rice

Overall Narrative Thread

a drainage channel through collective labour. That year the flood is not followed by famine. The clash between public welfare and the landlord’s interests is the kallol’s central event.

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Kallol 04 — In Vishwakarma’s Enclosure, Indra Holds the Nectar

Overall Narrative Thread

Freedom is presented through the metaphor of the nectar obtained by churning the ocean. In Bankipur Camp Jail, Mukhdev is imprisoned alongside Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulati Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, Rudramati and Raghuvaran. The question of why freedom fighters should remain in prison in a free country returns repeatedly. Memories of Maithili festivals, songs and cultural practices enrich the conversations within the prison.

Mukhdev speaks of his family’s leathercraft, their skill in making drums and mridangas, and an incident in which the woman from Sahebganj helped at a childbirth. Memories of Jageshwar and the affection within his family, the misconduct of the landlord’s enforcer Ba Jha, and Jageshwar’s resistance form a

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Kallol 04 — In Vishwakarma’s Enclosure, Indra Holds the Nectar

Overall Narrative Thread

background of violence. The meaning of independence is reconsidered through the question of who actually received the promised ‘nectar’.

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Kallol 05 — Bo-Bo

Overall Narrative Thread

A mythological account of Daksha’s sacrifice and Mahadeva’s anger explains the origin of the utterance ‘bo-bo’. Mukhdev’s fellow prisoners enjoy his skill as a storyteller, but the tale also repeatedly raises questions about women’s unequal position and the patriarchal order.

The practices of Nag Panchami—plastering and cleaning homes and courtyards, scattering parched rice, using kusha grass and neem, snake incantations, and the work of local midwives and ritual healers—come into view. The episodes involving Jagdarwali, Ashok Thakur’s wife, and Machhadhiwali, Mohammad Shamshul’s wife, reveal exchanges of knowledge between communities. Alongside religious faith, the main concerns here are practical healing, fear and the shared

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Kallol 05 — Bo-Bo

Overall Narrative Thread

conduct of everyday life.

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Kallol 06 — Brother Will Come Empty-Handed, Sitting in the Loft; Sister, I Shall Wear My Own Sari and Speak Your Name

Overall Narrative Thread

Stories of Kumarvrata and Pativrata expose the curious relationship among a woman’s austerities, marriage, service and a sage’s curse. Mukhdev asks why male sages in religious tales are so frequently ready to pronounce curses, while the demands of fidelity and suffering fall so heavily on women. Memories of Mamtod’s birth, childhood and folk songs are woven into this discussion.

The tale of the performers Hirni and Birni, congratulatory songs sung by Muslim Pamariya performers, charms against the evil eye and Mamtod’s childhood games open Mukhdev’s intimate world. At the end, Mukhdev and Jageshwar are arrested by the police while travelling towards Mamtod’s marital home. Secret information has been passed on, and suspicion falls

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Kallol 06 — Brother Will Come Empty-Handed, Sitting in the Loft; Sister, I Shall Wear My Own Sari and Speak Your Name

Overall Narrative Thread

upon Piar Bachcha. Both men are sent to Patna jail on serious charges; Mamtod’s waiting remains unfulfilled.

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Kallol 07 — The Spinning Wheel Hums and Hums; I Fear the Gathering Storm

Overall Narrative Thread

The kallol begins with mythological accounts of Uma, Parvati and Ganga, but its centre is Mamtod's growth and the learning she acquires within her own social environment. Raised in the household of Sahebganjwali and Parmeshwar Ram, she learns from folk songs, handicrafts, domestic work and community life. The narrative brings out the contrast between formal schooling and education gained through lived experience.

Jageshwar brings khadi cloth; Mamtod and her friends make and decorate bags out of khadi and leather. These bags reach the comrades, and spinning wheels find their way into households. Yet after the incident involving Ba Jha, fear and silence have entered Mamtod's mind. In the spinning-wheel song, labour is joined by

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Kallol 07 — The Spinning Wheel Hums and Hums; I Fear the Gathering Storm

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

undertones of waiting and insecurity. The prisoners listening to the story are left speechless.

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Kallol 08 — How Can a Daughter Live Without Her Mother Today? Again and Again She Will Start in Alarm

Overall Narrative Thread

Beginning with the story of Bhagiratha bringing the Ganga to earth, the narrative moves towards Mamtod's marriage. There is an extensive account of the marriage ceremonies, including kumaram, matkor, purba-pachhba, naghar, madhuparka, the wedding fire ritual and the scattering of parched rice. Women's songs and the participation of attendants, priests and relatives make the wedding both a personal event and a communal celebration.

Following the rituals, Mamtod departs for her husband's home. The fear produced by Ba Jha's violence seems to have eased somewhat on the wedding day, but separation from her parents brings profound pain. Listening in prison, Daulati Jahan and Rudramati remember the farewells of their own daughters.

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Kallol 08 — How Can a Daughter Live Without Her Mother Today? Again and Again She Will Start in Alarm

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

Mukhdev’s gaze remains fixed upon the emptiness left in memory.

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Kallol 09 — A Moonlike Face, Lotus Eyes, Brows Like Kamadeva’s Bow, Ripe-Tilkor Lips, a Parrot’s Beak for a Nose, and a Cuckoo’s Voice

Overall Narrative Thread

Myths of Gauri’s austerities, Mahadeva’s testing of her, and the burning of Kamadeva prompt questions about ideals governing relations between women and men. The story then turns to a collective gathering in Garh Narikel called ‘Chhabra Sabhak Thair’. Mukhdev, Jageshwar, Dukhan Mahato, Basu Chaupal and Jivach Mukhiya seek solutions to village problems; Piar Bachcha’s gathering is primarily directed towards advancing his own interests.

An important event is the effort to educate Ghenghi, also known as Kusumavati. Girls from different castes come to study with her, including Mamtod. The light of learning becomes more important than outward beauty. In the prison, Raghuvaran sings a Tamil children’s song and explains its meaning,

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Kallol 09 — A Moonlike Face, Lotus Eyes, Brows Like Kamadeva’s Bow, Ripe-Tilkor Lips, a Parrot’s Beak for a Nose, and a Cuckoo’s Voice

Overall Narrative Thread

revealing an intimate relationship among India’s languages.

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Kallol 10 — Why Has Your Face Grown Pale, Dear Lala? Why Is Your Heart So Sad?

Overall Narrative Thread

The first part of this kallol contains a humorous mythological story of Mahadeva and Gauri's marriage. Maina's embarrassment, the appearance of Shiva's attendants, the wedding itself and Gauri's family life are recounted as familiar interpretations of marriage rites.

The narrative then turns to folk songs about Lalban Baba and his encounter with a tigress, recalling wildlife, work and courage. A song about killing a peacock and the subsequent widowhood of the peahen directs Mukhdev's thinking towards criticism. Raghuvaran sings a Tamil children's song by Subramania Bharati, urging listeners not to fear those who commit injustice. Mukhdev compares Jageshwar's fearlessness with the behaviour of the new rulers of independent India.

Kallol 11 — Ukkhari and Samath: A Seer Each, a Seer Each

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

The kallol begins with popular tales of the births of Kartikeya and Ganesha, the sons of Gauri and Mahadeva. Among fields, agricultural work and Kartik-season rituals, the cultural meaning of a saying about ukkhar, samath and measures of grain comes into focus. Festivals in this village are inseparable from the agricultural calendar and its demands upon labour.

The story repeatedly touches on caste divisions, inherited occupations, crafts and the nature of knowledge. Mukhdev regards popular customs not simply as articles of faith but as expressions of the village’s resources, rights and collective memory. By placing present-day social questions beside mythological stories, this method broadens the cultural ground of the larger

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Kallol 11 — Ukkhari and Samath: A Seer Each, a Seer Each

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

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Kallol 12 — That Brahmin Boy Was Tempted, O Fate; Ask Him What Drew Him, Ask His Caste and Place, O Fate

Overall Narrative Thread

The stories of Gauri, Sandhya and Lili explore contradictions between religious ideals and marital good fortune, Mahadeva’s behaviour and the practice of marriage. Mukhdev connects these tales with the segregation of the leatherworkers’ settlement and the presence of the same ritual songs throughout the village. He asks why cultural roots should be so similar when the social boundaries remain so rigid.

Accounts of household deities such as Lalmain Baba, Mansaram and Lukesari are joined by discussions of the role of leatherworking women as traditional birth attendants, their skill in working leather, and the social devaluation of that craft. Raghuvaran uses the Bata shoe industry to illustrate disparities in the prestige accorded

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Kallol 12 — That Brahmin Boy Was Tempted, O Fate; Ask Him What Drew Him, Ask His Caste and Place, O Fate

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

to labour. References to Gangesha and his marriage to a leatherworking woman bring the tangled relations among knowledge, caste and historical memory into view.

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Kallol 13 — With a Kusha Stalk I Shall Pierce You, O Dhamiyain; Through Eighty Maunds of Stone I Shall Emerge

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

The story of Sukanya and the elderly sage is told alongside the Ashvini Kumaras’ restoration of youth. This is followed by an extensive Musahar ballad concerning Dina and Bhadri. Their struggle against the oppression of the landlord Kanak Singh and Budhni, their deaths through deception, and their subsequent recognition as folk deities form the main events.

The livelihoods of Bichkun Sadai, Jethiyahiwali, Bhurkuri and other Musahar families are also described, including their work in farming, bisandh gathering, beekeeping, sewing and expanding access to education. Bichkun, who is associated with Jageshwar, works for the advancement of his community. At the heart of the kallol lie the heroic traditions, practical skills and

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Kallol 13 — With a Kusha Stalk I Shall Pierce You, O Dhamiyain; Through Eighty Maunds of Stone I Shall Emerge

Overall Narrative Thread

aspirations for change of a socially despised group.

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Kallol 14 — The Spade Given by Brahma, the Path Cleared by Vishnu

Overall Narrative Thread

A story of a poor daughter-in-law’s suffering and the help offered by the serpent Bal-Basant explains the origin of a protective snake incantation. After folk beliefs concerning Vasuki’s family, the narrative discusses the historical identity of the Bhumihars and their connections with Buddhist and Jain traditions.

A lengthy Jain tale of the robber Rauhineya is the second principal episode. Hearing a small part of Mahavira’s discourse enables him to recognise a deception arranged by the minister Abhay Kumar. After receiving a promise of safety, he confesses his crimes and ultimately decides to enter the Jain order. In prison, Raghuvaran discusses Mahavira’s rainy-season residence, Videha’s Buddhist and Jain history, and

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Kallol 14 — The Spade Given by Brahma, the Path Cleared by Vishnu

Overall Narrative Thread

Mithila’s philosophical heritage.

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Kallol 15 — O Jata, Dust from the Fields Is No Ornament; Stay at Home, O Beloved Jata

Overall Narrative Thread

This kallol opens with the folk tale of Bairasi, Gosauni and Lili, involving marriage, disguises and a father-in-law’s curse. The history, songs and performance of the Jat-Jatin folk theatre then take centre stage. Performed by women in the months of Sawan and Bhadon, Jat-Jatin dramatises a wife’s wish to visit her parents’ home, marital disagreements, journeys away from home and eventual reunion.

The songs place a husband’s presence at home above ornaments or fine saris. This voice of separation connects with Jageshwar’s absence and Ghenghi’s waiting. Discussions of Piar Bachcha, landlord power and popular resistance connect the social meaning of folk theatre with the present.

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Kallol 16 — A Kick to the Chest, a Hand in the Hair, and Two and a Half Basketloads of Soil from the Co-Wife’s Pond

Overall Narrative Thread

This kallol recounts the hard fate written in the horoscope of Shrikar’s daughter, her marriage to King Suvarna, hunger and humiliation, and the observance of the Madhushravani vow. The younger queen’s opposition and the failure to convey news lead to the princess’s misery. Her dignity is restored once the truth comes out. A story of Ganesha distributing marital good fortune also forms part of this account.

Mukhdev compares prison to sleep, a place where remembered worlds and actual insecurity mingle. He recalls old philosophical conversations with Jageshwar concerning Vedic language, nature, God, Vachaspati Mishra and traditions of knowledge. At the end, night, the sound of flowing water and the wish to write deepen Mukhdev’s

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Kallol 16 — A Kick to the Chest, a Hand in the Hair, and Two and a Half Basketloads of Soil from the Co-Wife’s Pond

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

introspection.

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Kallol 17 — The Cow Is Barren, the Ox Bears Young; Behold the Ocean in a Drop

Overall Narrative Thread

The kallol begins with a swing song about Radha and Krishna, but soon turns to a clandestine revolutionary operation to destroy the Lachka bridge at Jatmalpur. Jageshwar, Mukhdev and comrades from different areas decide to target a bridge and roadway that have become instruments of British rule and landlord power. Mukhdev nevertheless asks what difficulties the action will cause ordinary people.

Before the operation, the comrades discuss different communities, languages and cultural histories. Forming a group, they carry explosives to the bridge, and an explosion destroys the Lachka crossing. During the escape, Chethru is wounded and falls; he is taken to Dhanesar’s farmstead. The kallol concludes by setting the collective

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Kallol 17 — The Cow Is Barren, the Ox Bears Young; Behold the Ocean in a Drop

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

purpose of the struggle against the price paid by one individual.

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Kallol 18 — I Shall Strike You, O Cuckoo, and Put Out Both Your Eyes; Your Song Sent My Beloved Away

Overall Narrative Thread

The wounded Chethru is kept at Dhanesar’s farmstead, and a traditional physician is summoned. Mukhdev and his companions try to extract a thorn, clean the wound and stop the bleeding. Discussion of nationalism and the poor people’s resistance continues beside the helpless body of the injured revolutionary. Mukhdev reflects that one cannot restore the life of a dead companion, although one may preserve that person’s ideas.

Meanwhile, the stories of Kamala, Bahura Godhin and Natua Dayal reappear in new forms. Episodes involving river water, ritual practices, dance and love become part of the folk narratives. A song of waiting for a beloved who has gone abroad makes separation the dominant note at the end.

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Kallol 19 — We Slept Together on One Bed, My Parrot; In a Dream I Saw the Swan Stolen Away

Overall Narrative Thread

Chethru is dead. Kunjan, Musai and Dhinai are also killed in events involving the cutting of telegraph wires, the destruction of the Nautaul-Dhanhar bridge and an operation at the police station. Mukhdev and Jageshwar survive, but the loss of their companions exposes the real human cost of rebellion.

Mukhdev tells the myth of the false allegation that Krishna stole the Syamantaka jewel. Jageshwar's question—whether destruction is the only end for those who struggle on behalf of the poor—becomes the emotional centre. British police demand that Jageshwar disclose information about the explosives and the comrades, but he refuses to answer. The inmates hearing the account are distressed by the memory of his death; the kallol closes

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Kallol 19 — We Slept Together on One Bed, My Parrot; In a Dream I Saw the Swan Stolen Away

Overall Narrative Thread

with a song of separation.

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Kallol 20 — O Mother, Honour This Humble Plea; Your Servant Folds His Hands, O Jagadamba

Overall Narrative Thread

Raghuvaran brings Mukhdev fresh news. Piar Bachcha’s influence has obstructed education and social inclusion; Dhaneshwar, Parshuram and others have resisted him. Yet Piar Bachcha himself is receiving a freedom fighter’s pension and gaining a seat in the legislative assembly. Kripanand’s struggle for an education is another example of this irony.

The Anant Chaturdashi vow is presented through the story Krishna tells Yudhishthira, along with the prosperity and misfortunes of Shila and Kaundinya. In this context arise the questions of Mukhdev’s long-awaited release and Ghenghi’s suffering. In the village, people continue to worship Bhagavati and pray for Mukhdev and Jageshwar’s safety; they plainly do not know of Jageshwar’s death.

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Kallol 21 — The Mother Cow Lowers for Her Calf

Overall Narrative Thread

The kallol begins with the Brahmin quarter, the cattle-herders’ neighbourhood, the Mahisbar community and caste relations. Discussions of Jageshwar’s killing and Mukhdev’s imprisonment accompany the emergence of Satyanarayan Yadav. Alongside the Yadav community’s cattle rearing, farming and songs, an extended folk narrative about a local deity named Kalidas is presented.

A new constitution, universal adult franchise and preparations for elections transform village politics. Radhamohan Rai is preparing to stand for the Socialists, while Piar Bachcha is the Congress contender. Satyanarayan Yadav explains to the villagers the value of their vote, and points to the irony of those who seek political office in place of those who

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Kallol 21 — The Mother Cow Lowers for Her Calf

Overall Narrative Thread

sacrificed themselves for independence. The underlying fear is that elected representatives may merely become a new version of the old landlords.

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Kallol 22 — No Plough, No Oxen: Dhodhay Madar

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

The story opens with a memory of Radhamohan Rai’s collective attempt to dig wells in the various settlements. Through the labour of Domi Mian, Lachhmi Tatma, Banjaras and others, access to water had improved; this public benefit made Piar Bachcha envious. Rumours continue to circulate about the arrest of Mukhdev and Jageshwar and their absence from the village.

In his election campaign Piar Bachcha invokes the Congress name, khadi and promises of new development. Yet he provides no concrete help over Jageshwar’s death, Ghenghi’s pension or Mukhdev’s imprisonment. Radhamohan Rai stands for socialist ideas and common resources; Satyanarayan Yadav is another oppositional voice. In the end, because public memory remains incomplete,

Kallol 22 — No Plough, No Oxen: Dhodhay Madar

Overall Narrative Thread

Piar Bachcha wins the election.

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Kallol 23 — Seven or Five Houses Were Set in Place; Beloved Ones Went Far Away

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

India’s Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950, yet Mukhdev remains confined in a prison of independent India. He discusses the Constitution, freedom and political rights with Raghuvaran and his fellow prisoners. The narrative passes through memories of indigo cultivation in Tirhut, the colonial economy, the Banjara community and the history of several rivers and embankments.

The difficulty of distinguishing freedom fighters from criminals in prison records obstructs Mukhdev’s release. Eventually, with the help of fellow prisoners and the jailer, he is set free. He bids farewell to Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulati Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan and Rudramati. His liberation brings happiness, but also the memory of a long

Kallol 23 — Seven or Five Houses Were Set in Place; Beloved Ones Went Far Away

Overall Narrative Thread

separation and Ghenghi’s uncertain waiting.

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Kallol 24 — A Castor-Pith Wick, a Baghanda Wick: What Home Have You Burned, Podinma's Grandchild?

Overall Narrative Thread

Even after leaving prison, Mukhdev does not return to Garh Narikel. Raghuvaran's comrades take him with them, while in the village Piar Bachcha attempts to claim false credit for his release. Through Kusumavati, Radhamohan Rai and others, the memories of the 1942 movement, khadi, flags, decisions about farming and the pre-independence organisations' struggle open up again.

Episodes concerning Domi Mian's involvement with the Muslim League, his idea of Pakistan and his political confusions reveal the distance between a national partition on religious lines and local everyday life. Lachhmi Tatma brings him back. The village's political direction emerges from the complicated situation involving Radhamohan Rai's Socialist position,

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Kallol 24 — A Castor-Pith Wick, a Baghanda Wick: What Home Have You Burned, Podinma’s Grandchild?

Overall Narrative Thread

Piar Bachcha’s Congress and the weak Communist organisation.

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Kallol 25 — A Watch While Sitting, a Kos While Walking

Overall Narrative Thread

Mukhdev travels with Raghuvaran to Madurai, where they discuss the politics of the Communist Party of India and the meaning of India’s freedom. At a gathering, Mukhdev presents his ideas through song. People begin calling him ‘Mohan Gabaiyya’, Mohan the Singer, and under this new name he starts singing at public meetings.

The questions of village development are now tied to floods, embankments on the Kamala-Balan, silt, fish and makhana, and drainage systems constructed by local people. Satyanarayan Yadav and others debate both the advantages and dangers of schemes to restrain rivers. After Mukhdev’s twelve years of imprisonment, the changed lives of Ghenghi and Kusumavati, and the continuing absence of Jageshwar, stand as

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Kallol 25 — A Watch While Sitting, a Kos While Walking

Overall Narrative Thread

irreversible losses.

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Kallol 26 — You Have Brought Such Suffering, Mother Kosi; Farmers Weep from the Embankment

Overall Narrative Thread

This kallol opens with a detailed portrait of the weaving, khadi trade and new opportunities in craftsmanship associated with the weaver Jagdish Mail and his son Mahesh. The arrival of an art enthusiast from outside the village brings attention to Bhola Pandit’s clay work and to the skills of leatherworkers, tailors, oil-pressers, masons, boatmen and other communities. Mohan Gabaiyya’s local knowledge is placed beside the laboratory-based conception of ‘development’ promoted by formal institutions.

Amid accounts of boats, rafts, floods and worship along the Kamala-Balan, questions arise about the possible harmful consequences of embankments. The village’s political alignments are also shifting. Discussion of denying Piar Bachcha

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Kallol 26 — You Have Brought Such Suffering, Mother Kosi; Farmers Weep from the Embankment

Overall Narrative Thread

a party nomination in the 1957 election points to the possibility of new leadership within the community.

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Kallol 27 — The Travelling Dancer Came from North and South, Beloved; She Sat Beneath the Channa Tree

Overall Narrative Thread

Episodes of Kosi embankment construction and devastating floods are interwoven with the Palghat and Amritsar congresses of the Communist Party of India. Mukhdev, now known as Mohan Gabaiyya, is active at political meetings. In the 1957 election Piar Bachcha is denied a ticket; Radhamohan Rai rejoins Congress, while Satyanarayan Yadav wins as the Socialist candidate.

During their travels, Mohan and Raghuvaran discuss folk song and dance within the Vedas, religious rigidity, education and society’s deprived groups. They meet Banjaras, Santals and members of other communities on the train. Accounts of Banjara speech, clothing and tattoos, and a Santal origin myth, reveal social diversity and the distinct struggles of nomadic

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Kallol 27 — The Travelling Dancer Came from North and South, Beloved; She Sat Beneath the Channa Tree

Overall Narrative Thread

communities.

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Kallol 28 — We Shall Cut Golden Thread and Weave a Net of Tassels

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

Amid famine and drying village ponds, Bichkun Sadai and Musahar families search for bisandh to sustain their lives. On one side is the lack of rain; on the other is a new form of flooding caused by river embankments, together with displacement and the destruction of agricultural land. Decisions about high embankments, drainage and resettlement seem remote from the experience of ordinary farmers.

Folk ballads about the Kosi’s course, Ranu Sardar, Koilabir, Baidla and the marriage of the river run beside scientific and administrative debates over embankments. The songs particularly evoke the river’s free movement and the sorrow of workers’ widows. Land nominally allotted to some flood-displaced village families proves unavailable

Kallol 28 — We Shall Cut Golden Thread and Weave a Net of Tassels

Overall Narrative Thread

in practice; a protest sit-in is held against this contradiction.

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Kallol 29 — The Holy Man Said, ‘I Shall Bind the Sky and the Netherworld’; His Wife Said, ‘First Mend the Broken Corner of Our Home’

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

Mohan Gabaiyya discusses the raised Bagmati embankments, blocked drainage and the incomplete arrangements for flood control. Against this background, the childhood of Dhirendra, the younger brother of Indrakant Mishra, is introduced. He is more interested in stories of ritual specialists, yoga, tantra and supernatural powers than in school lessons.

Dhirendra hears extensive folk tales of the origin of the Kamala, Natua Dayal, Koilabir, Amar Singh and an embankment made of bones. Again and again, these stories describe violent attempts to imprison a river and its eventual liberation. Influenced by accounts of an ascetic’s miracles, the adolescent Dhirendra leaves home for Rishikesh. His family is anxious; as time passes, the

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Kallol 29 — The Holy Man Said, ‘I Shall Bind the Sky and the Netherworld’; His Wife Said, ‘First Mend the Broken Corner of Our Home’

Overall Narrative Thread

village forgets him.

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Kallol 30 — In Bhadon, the Darkness Is Noted, the Light Is Noted, the Sunshine and Humidity Too

Overall Narrative Thread

The village’s ring embankments, landlords’ embankments and the distinct geography of Garh Ararneba are discussed. Through accounts of water projects on the Mahananda, Kari Kosi, Gandak, Bagmati and Kamala, the narrative questions the limits of policies intended to halt river flows. Social differences and conflicts over economic interests persist within the village.

News arrives that Dhirendra Mishra has become a celebrated yogi in Delhi and teaches yoga to powerful political leaders. He is being portrayed as a holy man capable of saving the village from floods. Hope, disbelief and rumour are all widespread. The narrative moves forward amid this uncertainty.

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Kallol 31 — Even Sugar Seems Less Sweet These Days

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

A myth portraying death as a woman of red and yellow colouring stirs Dhirendra’s memory. He returns to the village and meets his mother and his brother Indrakant. His prestige has grown because he is an influential yogi in Delhi. Political and administrative support gathers around the proposal to surround the village with high embankments.

Satyanarayan Yadav, Aruna Jha, Mukhdev and others, however, raise questions about lost land and local interests. The matter reaches officials, contractors, ministers, the chief minister and even the prime minister’s son. Despite Aruna Jha’s arrest and government restrictions, construction of the embankment proceeds. The image of sugar tasting less sweet expresses the pain of diminishing trust

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Kallol 31 — Even Sugar Seems Less Sweet These Days

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

and goodwill in independent India.

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Kallol 32 — Afraid of a Crow by Day, Swimming Across the River by Night

Overall Narrative Thread

1 / 2

The folk culture of Mohan Gabaiyya and the changing economic and social history of modern India form a broad panorama. Wages, government roads, remnants of landlord rule, mobile phones, industry, elections, the Sino-Indian War, the Emergency, Naxalbari, the Babri Masjid, the Green Revolution and globalisation all enter this kallol. The life of a local village is connected with national events.

Alongside the Green Revolution’s increased harvests, the narrative considers pesticides, inequalities and problems faced by agricultural workers. Land donation, landlessness, information technology and the actual accessibility of education become matters of debate. Discussions of Gaurishankar Sthan and Paramanand Paswan’s social work bring

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Kallol 32 — Afraid of a Crow by Day, Swimming Across the River by Night

Overall Narrative Thread

2 / 2

out the importance of Dalit education, water and collective organising at the local level.

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Kallol 33 — Who Fears Hunger in the Month of Aghan?

Overall Narrative Thread

Mohan Gabaiyya raises his voice against the discrepancy between government employment and minimum-wage rates. The principal problems are contractors' muster rolls, forged signatures, the exclusion of weaker or female workers, and the withholding of wage information. Nabi Baks, his mother and numerous villagers gather together through music.

Gradually, Mohan's singing becomes a collective demand for wages and rights. With the support of the Block Development Officer, Paramanand Paswan, a public hearing begins. The Sub-Divisional Officer listens reluctantly, and workers begin receiving appropriate payment. The text presents this local process as an effort at public accountability predating the Right to Information Act of 2005.

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Kallol 34 — A Seer of Wheat Will Last the Whole Year; I Shall Not Let My Beloved Go Away

Overall Narrative Thread

The first movement of the conclusion gives an extended account of the next generation of Garh Narikel families settling in Delhi—in Kishangarh, Mehrauli and Vasant Kunj. People once defined by their caste-based village occupations now work as teachers, doctors, bank officers, contractors, sanitation workers, masons, artisans and shopkeepers, occupying different economic positions. Through two mothers’ letters, the material prosperity of migrant children is set against the neglect of maternal affection and the painful growing distance from the village.

The second movement discusses cultivation, soil, ploughs and oxen, changed seed varieties, fertilisers, chemical agriculture, floods and embankments, and the village’s altered way

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Kallol 34 — A Seer of Wheat Will Last the Whole Year; I Shall Not Let My Beloved Go Away

Overall Narrative Thread

of life. The ballad of Dholan and the Madwan maiden revives memory and storytelling traditions. In the third movement, with depictions of handfuls of rice, alms, labour and rural farming life, the elderly Mohan Gabaiyya appears once more. Villagers regard his songs and struggles as a living tradition. Finally it becomes clear that Mukhdev never actually told the original ‘Sahasrashirsha’ tale: the novel itself assumes the form of a collective story with a thousand heads, voices and experiences.

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WORK / कृति

11 · Code Name: The Crocodile in Tarhadi

Chapters 0–12 · Epilogue · Additional Final Chapter 0

SECTION / खण्ड

Overall Story Synopsis

11 · Code Name: The Crocodile in Tarhadi

Overall Story Synopsis

In this novel, crime changes its form from guns, fear and direct violence to mobile phones, digital figures and invisible financial fraud. Nand Aruni, who reads the records, and his guide Gop Kumar open a new file called “Later Water” after the old Khataas case. A poor boy with an extraordinary technical gift, driven by social humiliation and a hunger to be seen, becomes the operator of an invisible fraud network under the names “Talgohee” and then “Panikaua.” His real name is Chhotan.

The special task force brings together Arunesh Mishra’s caution about evidence, Abhayakant Jha’s experience, Sunayna Thakur’s technical analysis and Dhirketu Jha’s knowledge of older financial networks. The fraud spread through poor young men such

Overall Story Synopsis

as Manoj, Birju Sah’s conversion of illicit money, and the criminal’s hunger for recognition combine to create cracks in the network. Although Chhotan keeps changing his name, he cannot erase the distinctive traces of his conduct.

Chapter 12 and the first epilogue accept, according to the public account, that Chhotan met a watery end in the river, although no body was found. But the original book’s additional final “Chapter 0: A Net within the Net” reverses that conclusion. The secret record reveals that the apparent death was staged to mislead; through a controlled shadow network, repeated patterns of behaviour, human connections and independent evidence, Chhotan is captured alive and held in judicial custody. The book

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Overall Story Synopsis

concludes that the lasting foundation of social memory is not an individual or a code name, but the recognition of criminal methods and corroborated traces.

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Chapter 0 — Archival Opening

Overall Story Synopsis

In the old records room behind Channa Grove, Nand Aruni and Gop Kumar read files connected with the city’s memory of crime. Nand closes an old bundle bearing the title “Khataas Was Killed.” Gop Kumar reminds him that the death of one criminal does not prove that the system of crime has ended. A person may die, but his network and methods may survive in another form.

Gop Kumar opens a new chest called “Later Water.” Inside are no bullets, blood or post-mortem papers; instead there are figures relating to telephones, accounts, cards and screens. Among these documents, a strange signature repeatedly appears: “Talgohee.” Nand realizes that a new kind of criminal can plunder people’s savings while sitting far away, without ever

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Chapter 0 — Archival Opening

Overall Story Synopsis

entering their homes. Gop Kumar teaches him to read the traces of conduct rather than pursue names alone.

This opening provides the archival frame for the main narrative. It establishes the transition from Khataas’s overt violence to the invisible financial violence of “Talgohee.”

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Chapter 1 — A Network without a Name

Overall Story Synopsis

After Khataas's death, an outward peace returns to the capital city, but the spread of mobile phones and digital transactions creates a new market for crime. In a poor family from the flood-stricken Kamala-Balan region, the boy's father works away from home as a labourer at a brick kiln, while his mother transplants rice in other people's fields. The boy is not attracted to school, but he takes an extraordinary interest in repairing broken radios, clocks and telephones. When an elderly woman shows him affection after he repairs her radio, he experiences for the first time the pleasure of "being seen."

At thirteen, he takes a job in a city mobile-phone shop. Amid low wages, humiliation and the shopkeeper's jealousy, he quietly

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Chapter 1 — A Network without a Name

Overall Story Synopsis

learns how to repair phones. When money goes missing from the shop, he is called a thief without evidence; the owner's remarks insulting his labourer father and his caste wound him deeply. He vows that the world will feel his power without ever discovering his real identity.

At a cybercafé, he discovers a world of anonymous online fraud. Using his technical skill, he brings together many unemployed and debt-ridden small-time swindlers under a common method and builds an invisible arrangement for taking a share from every fraud. He does not come forward himself; the code name "Talgohee" becomes his identity. His inner conflict is between wanting complete invisibility and craving intensely to be seen by everyone.

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Chapter 2 — The Task Force Enters New Waters

Overall Story Synopsis

The temporary special task force formed for the Khataas case has now become a permanent institution. Arunesh Mishra repeatedly warns new officers: “Do not mistake an inference for evidence.” Abhayakant Jha is experienced at interpreting the clues left by telephone voices, contacts and silences, but his older investigative tools seem inadequate against this new crime unfolding across screens and numbers.

In these circumstances, Sunayna Thakur joins the task force. Older officers initially underestimate her ability to interpret information and technical traces. But after reading hundreds of complaints about small frauds over three nights, she discovers that, despite differences in the amounts, locations and complainants, the

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Chapter 2 — The Task Force Enters New Waters

Overall Story Synopsis

method of deception and one distinctive mistake are the same. She concludes that someone is teaching separate fraudsters to operate in a single way.

Abhayakant calls this shared connection a “knot,” and Arunesh makes clear that it remains an investigative hypothesis, not evidence acceptable in court. The task force stops compiling a list of names and instead makes a list of methods. Gradually, the signature of “Talgohee” becomes visible behind the scattered complaints.

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Chapter 3 — The Meeting of Two Waters

Overall Story Synopsis

1 / 2

Talgohee gains immense digital wealth from fraud, but figures on a screen cannot directly become food, a home or land. To bring the proceeds of crime into the physical world, he needs a separate network. This need brings him into contact with Birju Sah, who, in Khataas's time, was skilled at making illicit earnings appear legitimate through documents, businesses and transactions.

The two do not meet face to face; their partnership is formed through messages. Birju knows the old routes through which money passes, while Talgohee knows the new system of digital fraud. They join forces on the condition that each will remain invisible within his own field. Talgohee now imposes a kind of invisible tax on small-time fraudsters:

Chapter 3 — The Meeting of Two Waters

Overall Story Synopsis

information about anyone who refuses to pay his share reaches the police.

This chapter binds Khataas’s old financial network and the new cybercrime into a single thread. Birju’s arrangements strengthen Talgohee, but they also bring his wealth down into the tangible world and create the possibility of catching him.

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Chapter 4 — The First Knot

Overall Story Synopsis

Sunayna Thakur uses the recurring pattern of deception and the same repeated mistake to find connections within groups of fraudsters. Arunesh Mishra advises that such a vast network should be approached not merely through inference but through a small, real human link. In this process a poor young man named Manoj is identified. Troubled by his father’s illness, the debt incurred for his sister’s marriage and the struggle to obtain food, Manoj has rented out his bank account, through which other people’s stolen money flows.

The police arrest him, but instead of treating Manoj simply as a petty criminal and sending him to prison, Abhayakant Jha listens to his account. He calls Manoj’s wrongdoing wrong while also recognizing how

Chapter 4 — The First Knot

Overall Story Synopsis

Manoj himself has been exploited. When Manoj begins to trust him, he describes the platform, contacts and words through which he was recruited into the network. Eventually a reference to “Talgohee” comes to light.

This first solid connection gives the task force a direction for investigation. Abhayakant nevertheless makes it clear that discovering a lead and arresting a criminal on legally valid evidence are different things. The narrative reveals the interconnection among its three metaphors: small fish, knot and crocodile.

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Chapter 5 — The Name Changes; the Traces Remain

Overall Story Synopsis

Manoj’s sudden disappearance, the silence of a fraud platform and the failure of an old associate to respond warn Talgohee that something is wrong. Birju Sah advises him to hide deeper. Talgohee discards his old digital identity, “Talgohee,” and adopts a new code name, “Panikaua,” in the hope of confusing the investigators.

Sunayna initially sees this change as a defeat for the investigation. Abhayakant reminds her of her own principle: a name can be changed, but a method and the distinctive rhythm of habitual behaviour are much harder to alter. Examining new complaints, Sunayna finds that the same recurring mistake and organizational pattern continue in Panikaua’s activities.

In the dialogue between Nand Aruni and Gop Kumar,

Chapter 5 — The Name Changes; the Traces Remain

Overall Story Synopsis

the point emerges that the history of crime is not a list of names but a memory of traces. The story’s central thread now becomes clear: Talgohee and Panikaua are not two different people but two disguises adopted by the same criminal.

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Chapter 6 — The Conflict of Distance

Overall Story Synopsis

1 / 2

Although the task force follows Panikaua’s online activity, it cannot find his actual location. He keeps changing his digital presence. Abhayakant explains that trying to catch the criminal in his strongest territory—inside an invisible screen—will exhaust the task force. His real weakness arises at the moment when stolen numbers turn into money, property or business in the physical world.

The direction of the investigation changes accordingly. Along with clues from screens, investigators begin examining hawala transfers, tenders, businesses held under false names, sudden building construction and other economic activity. Arunesh Mishra regards Sunayna’s new technical approach and Abhayakant’s old financial experience as

Chapter 6 — The Conflict of Distance

Overall Story Synopsis

complementary.

Dhirketu Jha is called in again for this work. He recognizes old criminal-world contacts, faces and routes used to move black money, even though he does not understand the new digital system. This combined method of “new water” and “old earth” prepares the investigators to reach Panikaua’s financial base.

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Chapter 7 — The Shadow of the Old Crocodile

Overall Story Synopsis

Unusual financial activity suddenly appears in several parts of the district: transactions in the account of a closed sugar mill, renovation of a dharamshala without any identifiable donor, and the lease of a village pond taken by an unknown buyer. Seen separately, these incidents appear ordinary. But Abhayakant Jha calls for documents from the old Khataas case and compares the patterns of transactions across the two periods.

He finds that the sequence of businesses operated under concealed identities, the ordering of papers and the method of withdrawing money resemble those of the old network. Recognizing this distinctive signature, Dhirketu names “Birju Sah.” It becomes clear that Panikaua carries out fraud online while Birju

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Chapter 7 — The Shadow of the Old Crocodile

Overall Story Synopsis

supplies routes through which the proceeds can enter the physical economy.

Arunesh considers it wrong to arrest Birju without sufficient evidence, since such haste might alert Panikaua. The task force decides to monitor Birju’s activities from a distance. Here the older memory of crime serves two roles: it sustains the continuity of criminal practice, and it also provides a means of identifying it.

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Chapter 8 — The Man Who Erased His Name Wanted to Be Seen

Overall Story Synopsis

Having hidden his real name and face, Panikaua feels an ever stronger version of his old hunger to “be seen.” He remembers how the mobile-shop owner insulted him as the son of a labourer. Despite his boundless wealth, he cannot display his success under his own name before the person who humiliated him.

Through Birju Sah, he sends money to his old neighbourhood. His mother’s mud house becomes a permanent brick-built house; a village road is paved; and the son of the shopkeeper who insulted him receives a mysterious sum. Panikaua believes that people will feel his presence even though his true identity remains concealed. But these personal attachments weaken his invisibility.

Dhirketu notices the abnormal flow of money into the

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Chapter 8 — The Man Who Erased His Name Wanted to Be Seen

Overall Story Synopsis

small town. Sunayna searches old census, school and shop records and finds the name of a labourer’s son who left the village years before. At this stage the identification is only a possibility; Abhayakant prevents an arrest until firm evidence is obtained.

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Chapter 9 — Inference and Evidence

Overall Story Synopsis

1 / 2

Sunayna has found a possible name, face and village. She wants an immediate arrest, but Arunesh Mishra explains that suspicion points an investigation in a direction; it does not automatically become evidence before a court. For that, the event, the person and the crime must be connected in a manner that can be independently tested. The task force adopts a policy of patient evidence gathering.

Meanwhile, Panikaua’s ambitions change. Money and invisible control alone no longer satisfy him; he seeks public prestige through legitimate shops operated in other people’s names, social-service projects and the patronage of politicians and contractors. He is drawn toward the very visible power of Khataas that he had erased his identity

Chapter 9 — Inference and Evidence

Overall Story Synopsis

to avoid.

Abhayakant takes this transformation as a sign that Panikaua is giving up his strongest protection. The chapter accords equal importance to technical investigation, the criminal's psychological insecurity and the legal requirement for evidence.

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Chapter 10 — The Crack

Overall Story Synopsis

Birju Sah is frightened by Panikaua’s desire for fame and dominance. For Birju, remaining unseen is a condition of survival, whereas Panikaua wants the world’s attention. This conflict opens a rift between criminals of two generations. Over the phone, Birju insists on caution, but Panikaua dismisses his caution as the fear of old age.

Abhayakant understands that such a network may collapse through the collision of interests and fears within it rather than through force applied from outside. Instead of arresting Birju at once, he creates circumstances that make him uneasy: small raids, rumours and news of arrests among old acquaintances. Birju begins destroying old documents, securing money and distancing himself from Panikaua.

Chapter 10 — The Crack

Overall Story Synopsis

Dhirketu sees traces of these activities, but Abhayakant deliberately allows Birju an opportunity to leave. Once Birju flees, Panikaua will lose a trusted route for turning his wealth into money in the real world and will make more mistakes. Gop Kumar reminds them that a surviving accomplice such as Birju may remain a danger in the future.

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Chapter 11 — The Bank

Overall Story Synopsis

After Birju Sah disappears, Panikaua is left alone. In the digital world he possesses figures running into crores, but the old arrangement that converted them into tangible money has closed. If he looks for new partners, the risk increases; if he touches his old assets, the task force may be watching. He understands that wealth inside a screen must come down onto the earth if it is to sustain his life.

Abhayakant infers that a cornered Panikaua will try to escape. If every route is closed, he may remain hidden; therefore the task force deliberately leaves one route open. It leads toward the far side of the Kamala-Balan. Panikaua believes he has discovered the route through his own cleverness and moves in that direction.

The

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Chapter 11 — The Bank

Overall Story Synopsis

2 / 2

chapter makes the criminal’s journey from invisibility to visibility its central movement. According to the public record, his progress from the water toward the bank prepares the way for his “water burial,” but the reliability of this account is reconsidered in the final secret chapter.

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Chapter 12 — Water Burial

Overall Story Synopsis

In the public record’s account, the Kamala-Balan is swollen on the last day of the rains. Panikaua tries to cross in a small dinghy, carrying a bag of devices, papers and material connected with his digital funds. On the opposite bank, Abhayakant Jha waits to capture him alive so that the entire criminal network can be understood. But, allegedly, the dinghy rocks in midstream; the sound of water and a human cry are heard, and then everything falls silent.

Later, investigators find a broken dinghy, a wet bag and a pair of slippers, but despite an extensive search, no body is found. On this basis, the record presents the story of Panikaua’s “water burial.” Sunayna reveals his true name, “Chhotan,” from old records: he was the

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Chapter 12 — Water Burial

Overall Story Synopsis

labourer’s son who left home at thirteen and possessed an exceptional talent for repairing mobile phones.

At this point the narrative says that the man who wanted to become great in the eyes of others has remained invisible even in death. Nevertheless, the absence of a body is not itself proof of death; the later additional “Chapter 0: A Net within the Net” reverses this public conclusion. Thus the “water burial” is the record’s reported conclusion in this chapter, not the final verified event.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Epilogue

11 · Code Name: The Crocodile in Tarhadi

Epilogue

Nand Aruni closes the public “Later Water” file and reflects on the supposedly similar endings of Khataas and Chhotan. Gop Kumar points out that even after a person’s end, the methods of fraud, minor accomplices, old routes for laundering money and the structures that protect crime can remain in place. The fact that Birju Sah escapes reinforces this warning.

According to Gop Kumar, the investigation’s real achievement is not merely establishing a criminal’s name but recognizing the traces of his method. Khataas’s gun and Chhotan’s numbers are outwardly different, yet both are connected to the desire for financial gain, fear, protection and public domination. Nand writes on the “Later Water” file that names will continue to

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Epilogue

change, but the traces must be remembered.

On the basis of the history visible to the public, this epilogue offers an instructive conclusion. Yet the original manuscript does not stop here. An additional chapter containing a secret record develops the understanding that public memory and full knowledge of what actually happened may be different.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Additional Final Chapter 0 — A Net within the Net

11 · Code Name: The Crocodile in Tarhadi

Additional Final Chapter 0 — A Net within the Net

After reading the word “The End,” Gop Kumar stops Nand Aruni and takes a black bundle out of a secret compartment in the chest. He explains that the public story of the “water burial” was not the whole truth. On the eleventh day after the supposed river accident, Sunayna had questioned the wet bag: why would so cautious a criminal carry all his secret material in a single bag while escaping? She pointed out that no body had been found, but this did not establish that he was dead. Arunesh’s rule, “Do not mistake an inference for evidence,” becomes decisive again.

The task force does not immediately correct the public report of the death, so that Chhotan, if alive, will consider it a protective cover and become careless. With

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Additional Final Chapter 0 — A Net within the Net

judicial permission, a controlled “shadow network” is set up from the old criminal network, containing neither real victims nor real money. Sunayna searches not for a name or a device but for Chhotan’s sequence of checking signals, the time he pauses, the rhythm with which he returns and recurring patterns in his behaviour. After a few weeks, the same habits appear in small signals arriving under different names. By constructing a net within the shadow network, the task force identifies the chain of his contacts.

Every link in that chain leads to an ordinary mobile-repair stall near the border. There, a thin man living under another name repairs broken telephones and radios, just as the boy had done in childhood. The task force

Additional Final Chapter 0 — A Net within the Net

does not rush: only after activities, human connections, records of the old network and independent evidence corroborate one another do Sunayna and Abhayakant capture him alive at dawn. When he hears his true name, “Chhotan,” the screen of his assumed identity falls away.

The secret record states explicitly that the “water burial” in the Kamala-Balan was a deceptive scene devised by Chhotan. The final chapter also reinterprets the river, bag, dinghy and accident as images of a cyber-screen. Chhotan did not die in the water; he abandoned his code name and escaped. News of his arrest was not immediately made public, so that the rest of the network could be investigated. The final record gives his status as “alive, in judicial

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Additional Final Chapter 0 — A Net within the Net

custody.” The real victory is not the death of a name, but capturing a criminal alive by means of behavioural traces and legally admissible evidence.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Relation between the Endings: Public Record and Secret Record

11 · Code Name: The Crocodile in Tarhadi

Relation between the Endings: Public Record and Secret Record

In Chapter 12 and the epilogue, Chhotan’s water burial is the account given by the public record. At that time, the absence of a body is a fact established by the available material, but death is not proved. The additional final chapter reveals Chhotan’s capture alive on the basis of the secret investigation. The book’s final, revised narrative fact is therefore: “Chhotan is alive and in judicial custody.” Treating both accounts as equally final truths and merging them would erase the decisive turn in the original story.

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WORK / कृति

12 · Five Percent Darkness

Six Parts · 120 Chapters · One Epilogue | Chapter-by-Chapter Summaries

SECTION / खण्ड

About These Summaries

12 · Five Percent Darkness

About These Summaries

This document presents a separate summary of each chapter, based on the original narrative of Five Percent Darkness. The sequence and titles of the chapters have been kept in accordance with the original book. The summary of “Epilogue: The Next Name”, placed at the end of Part Three, has likewise been included in its proper position. The purpose of these summaries is to illuminate the course of events, the roles of the characters and the principal questions of the narrative; they are not intended to take the place of the original novel.

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SECTION / खण्ड

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Chapters 1–20

1. The Night of Five Hundred Rupees

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

The story opens beneath the railway bridge in Darbhanga, at Rani Devi’s small shop, and with the online gambling of her son, Amresh. Playing with stakes of five hundred rupees, Amresh has become trapped in heavy losses. Meanwhile, unknown sums enter Rani’s bank account and are immediately withdrawn. In Delhi, Neelima Jha, who works in financial investigation, begins examining these transactions. She receives a threatening message invoking “five percent” and a suspicious photograph, taken in Macau, of Vivek Sood, a former officer believed to be dead. An ordinary family crisis begins to point towards international crime.

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2. Open to India, Closed to Everyone Else

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Cybercrime Inspector Arunima Rao and Neelima Jha trace the payment channels of a gambling website called “Amber-9”. The system, directed at Indian customers, is using accounts opened in the names of numerous ordinary citizens. They do not accept the alleged turnover of two thousand crore rupees as an established fact. Money extorted from a retired teacher in Patna by threatening him with “digital arrest” has travelled through the same accounts. Why should the payment routes for gambling and fraud, though distinct offences, converge? This becomes a central question of the investigation.

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3. The Attendance of a Dead Man

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Doubts arise about the identification of the body in Vivek Sood's supposed accident when a distinctive old burn scar is missing from its palm. A notebook in Vivek's handwriting describes the five percent as "the price of silence", but one page has been torn out. It appears that Rani Devi's name has been misused to identify the sender of a consignment. Amid threats, Amresh returns home frightened by two strangers. The police and Neelima give priority to the safety of Rani and Amresh and to the boy's voluntary statement. Alongside the crime, the shame and fear borne by its victims come into view.

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4. The Account’s Other Owner

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Rani Devi visits the bank and asks for particulars of the unusual transactions passing through an account in her name. Compliance officer Sujata Thakur patiently hears her account and distinguishes the holder of an account from the person actually operating it. An intermediary named Manish had paid Rani five thousand rupees to obtain her signature. Her old notebook yields clues connected with Supaul, Madhubani and Samastipur. Complaints from all three districts seem to lead to the same intermediary organisation. The chapter brings into relief financial rights, incomplete consent and the importance of written evidence.

5. The Court of Falsehood

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Shivshankar Mishra, a retired teacher in Patna, has lost the one lakh eighty-three thousand rupees saved for his daughter Madhavi’s wedding after being terrorised by the false threat of “digital arrest”. Arunima and Neelima make it clear that he is not a criminal but a complainant in a fraud. Journalist Revati Karn questions the relationship between the “Safe India Campaign” and sponsorship provided by businessman Viraj Sahni. A reference to an organisation in Malta gives the investigation an international direction. Family suffering, journalistic responsibility and the discipline of not levelling unverified accusations stand at the chapter’s centre.

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6. The First Map of the Money

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Neelima, Arunima and their colleagues draw up the first financial map of suspicious accounts spread across the country. They establish that counting the deposits, wagers and withdrawals of the same money as separate fresh receipts can produce false figures. They keep account holders’ statements, actual control of the accounts and the timing of transactions distinct. On this map of crime, a question mark matters more than a presumed culprit. Alongside the fear experienced by Rani and Amresh in Darbhanga emerges the investigators’ resolve: first identify those affected, and only then seek the true owners.

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7. An Unfamiliar Signature

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

In Surat, Aditi Rane, who is examining export accounts, comes across suspicious bills for “consultancy and market-expansion services” connected with the textile trade. The movement of goods, proof of services, the issuing stamp and the timing of signatures do not agree. Aditi refuses to share confidential papers without an authorised request and insists on verification against original records. A programme document carries a signature in the name of someone who died three years before the event took place. Suspicion of falsified financial documents deepens.

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8. Amresh’s Reckoning

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Amresh begins keeping separate accounts of his wins and losses in mobile gambling, his debts and the threats he has received. Instead of blaming him, Rani gives him the courage to speak the truth and remain safe. As his experience is put into writing, the importance of the victim’s consent and a child’s privacy becomes clear. Neelima advises that the notebook be preserved, while warning that not every line in it will automatically become admissible evidence in court. When a new promotional message arrives, incorporating sums from his earlier games, Amresh realises that those running the gambling operation may be monitoring his behaviour.

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9. The Misuse of Aadhaar

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Arunima reaches Patna to investigate complaints that identity papers and copies of Aadhaar documents have been misused to open bank accounts. Discrepancies between the thumb impression of Nanhki, an elderly woman, and the written particulars of her documents show that a signature or thumbprint does not, by itself, amount to fully informed consent. Branch manager Jayant Sinha secures the records. An employee, Sanjana, finds the courage to provide information about a letter halting an earlier review and about the timing of a transfer. The chapter illuminates the rights of vulnerable banking customers and the role of an employee who acts with integrity.

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10. The First Letter of Five Percent

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Journalist Revati Karn tries to connect disparate leads involving Rani in Darbhanga, a public campaign in Patna and export accounts in Surat. Despite editorial pressure, she remains determined not to publish unsubstantiated allegations. A letter referring to “five percent”, together with references to the expenses of a public meeting, leads her to ask whether sponsorship is connected to an alleged fee charged by the criminals. Meghna Sen’s questions bring an international payment link into view. The emphasis falls on caution: an anonymous source may disclose the truth, but may equally be used to mislead.

11. The Window in Hong Kong

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen, an examiner of financial records, and her colleague Tara Lama scrutinise documents relating to promotional expenditure and payments connected with Indian business. Discrepancies appear among the services actually supplied, the contracts and the roles of the companies. It becomes necessary to distinguish a “customer centre”, payment partners, providers of gaming content and promoters. Tara sends a message saying she has found a “wrong date”, then becomes unreachable. Meghna does not pronounce her missing without evidence, but prepares to initiate a formal search. Uncertainty about Vivek Sood’s death likewise persists.

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12. The Last Glass of Tea

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Tara Lama is absent from the office, yet notice of personal leave has been sent in her name from a management account. Meghna Sen reconstructs the sequence of Tara’s last appearance, an unfinished glass of tea, office timings and her colleagues’ statements. Rather than instantly treating an ordinary object as proof of a crime, she concentrates on preserving it and securing authorised examination. An invitation to a conference, stipulating that questions must not be submitted in advance, and its unexpected mention of Tara heighten suspicion. Where Tara is, and whether her disappearance is connected with the event, remain unanswered.

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13. The Other Language of Paper

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Investigators examine promotional material claiming “European approval” for a Malta-linked company and the recurrence of certain names in the expense accounts of the Patna campaign. Neelima Jha and Arunima Rao explain that an advertising claim, an actual legal licence and the territory within which it applies are not the same thing. Contracts in different languages, their dates and descriptions of services must be read for differences in meaning. An institutional letter attempts to suppress the inquiry by calling its questions unnecessary. A reference number seen beside the five percent raises fresh doubts, but comparison with the original documents is still pending.

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14. The Price of Endorsement

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

At Patna’s “Youth Awakening” meeting, genuine programmes against addiction and for cyber safety coexist with opaque sponsorship. Revati Karn and Prachi Jha, who is involved in the event, raise questions about expenditure, lists of supporters and public reporting. They insist that the name of a contributor, a financial donation and an endorsement of ideas must not be treated as interchangeable. A list includes someone Prachi believes died two years earlier. No conclusion is reached without checking the identification of the deceased and the dates on the documents; nevertheless, the question of whether someone is purchasing endorsements grows sharper.

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15. The Wages of Silence

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Through Vivek Sood’s former office and people who knew him, the links between silence, salary and incomplete records become clearer. Neelima and Arunima compare the provenance of old letters, lines inserted later and different copies of the same papers. Available versions of one document show variations in handwriting and the trimming of a page. Rather than declaring such differences proof of a conspiracy, they investigate the original, its history of receipt and the secure chain of custody. The chapter ends with a question: who cut a page from Vivek’s papers, and why was it altered?

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16. The White Envelope

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

In Mumbai, financial consultant Aarav Malkani receives a white envelope connected with company records. It refers to six files and contains instructions relating to five percent; a request to destroy certain papers raises the possibility of evidence being erased. Questions from his colleague Taruni compel Aarav to examine whether the services were real and the accounts justified. He has the envelope registered in an authorised secure place and preserves the record of its receipt. A file entitled “Final Account” provides a new lead towards a possible link with Vivek Sood’s old papers.

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17. The Counterfeit Face of a Uniform

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

The mental suffering of Shivshankar Mishra, victim of the “digital arrest” fraud, and his family’s support are portrayed. A counterfeit uniform, a fictitious court and the fear of being controlled over video had made the teacher a prisoner in his own home. His daughter Madhavi gives him the courage to speak first to those closest to him. Arunima Rao notices similarities in the language and papers used in various complaints of fraud, but does not claim that the same gang is responsible without proof. The chapter brings out the importance of public vigilance, victims’ privacy and familial trust in the face of fear.

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18. Behind the Advertisement

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Journalist Kabir searches through promotional pamphlets and visual material for possible connections between online gambling advertisements and a social campaign. A painting by Pranay of a mask half white and half black becomes a symbol of the space between truth and accusation. Editor Sudip Bhatnagar raises questions about advertisers' objections, the organisation's financial interests and the sources of published material. Kabir decides to prevent the improper circulation of a suspicious private image. The chapter's central concern is to uphold the boundaries of personal liberty, consent and evidence-based journalism even while conducting an investigation.

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19. The Silence of a Luxury Flight

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Neelima Jha sets out for Hong Kong and Macau under an authorised procedure and with local cooperation. Meghna’s audit, the disputed image of Vivek Sood and the guest list of a Macau conference draw her there. During the journey she remains wary of special favours unexpectedly offered and informal approaches. Sameer Bose, an employee in Macau, agrees to testify subject to conditions. Neelima asks him to keep what he has personally seen separate from what he has merely heard or inferred. The ground is thus prepared for the direct testimony of the next chapter.

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20. A Face Behind Glass

The Empire of Five Hundred Rupees

Inside a glittering Macau hotel, the labour, insecurity and lived experience of service employee Sameer Bose come to light. His knowledge of the guest list and arrangements for a conference may be useful in probing Vivek's suspicious appearance there. Under the pressure of their jobs, employees such as Aan-Lin are not in a position to speak openly. Sameer understands his right to give evidence of his own free will, but an unfamiliar mark beside his name on the list increases his anxiety. Whether a woman named Mira can leave safely becomes a new human question carrying the story forward.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Chapters 21–40

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21. The Dance Hall in Macau

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

At a Macau hotel, Neelima meets Sameer Bose in due legal form, in the presence of Joanna, a local liaison officer. Sameer recounts what he himself saw of the conference arrangements, the guest list and Vivek Sood’s possible presence. Who made the marks on the list, and who took the photograph, remain separate questions. Neelima takes seriously the risks to the witness’s employment and safety. Meanwhile Mira is again ready to make a statement. Yet her empty passport cover, and the question of the rights of a person absent from the employment contract, give rise to suspicions of human trafficking.

22. The Empty Passport Cover

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Having reached a place of refuge, Mira gradually recovers her ability to make decisions freely. How her original passport was taken from her, and through whose hands it passed, become matters for investigation. Local officer Joanna is careful about Mira’s name, the language of her statement, the limits of confidentiality and her voluntary consent. Mira speaks to her family and expresses concern for the safety of another woman, Sujata. At last, signing in her own hand, she requests that Sujata be found. The hollow shell of a document and the deprivation of a person’s rights form the chapter’s central image.

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23. The Relationship Between Two Men

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Brussels, Alice Vander examines discrepancies in the sponsorship of an art exhibition, visual rights and the costs of staging. In Delhi, unknown people seek to make the private relationship between journalist Kabir and artist Pranay an instrument of threats and humiliation. Unauthorised curiosity about the relationship between two men arises at the office, but the editor opposes turning it into either a news story or a means of pressure. Kabir protects his private life and continues investigating the financial leads. The chapter makes clear that exposing someone’s intimate life under the pretext of investigating a crime is an injustice.

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24. The Consent of Two Women

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Arizona, digital evidence specialist Isha examines record timestamps within the limits of her lawful authority. A difference of seventeen minutes appears between two entries, but it is necessary to distinguish unsynchronised clocks from deliberate alteration. Isha and Sara discuss their relationship, the distance between them and their mutual consent. Alongside the technical investigation, this personal encounter raises questions of trust and consent. Isha passes the time discrepancy to the appropriate authority, without claiming that a crime has thereby been proved.

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25. The Seal of Malta

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Malta, Sofia Vella examines the actual legal meaning of three separate documents bearing seals that look alike. The claim of authorisation used in Indian advertisements proves different from the company's real powers. A distinction is established between a proposed grant, institutional assent and money actually sent or received. Indian officials request certified records. Sofia discovers correspondence for different organisations arriving at the same address. How are the names of several companies at a single address being used in Indian publicity and financial transactions? The question remains.

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26. The Three-Layered Company

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Finding the names of many companies on the letterboxes of one building in Malta, Sofia examines their actual registrations, service obligations and ownership structures. A three-tier corporate arrangement is not in itself criminal, but it can conceal the identities of customers, managers and beneficiaries. In Surat, Aditi Rane finds similarities between a service invoice carrying the same reference and a receipt associated with Patna. No conclusion is drawn by connecting separate documents without their original supporting evidence. The need to examine warehouse vehicles and the actual movement of goods opens another line of inquiry.

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27. The Shadow of Exported Lies

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

At the warehouse of Sagarvastra Exports in Surat, Aditi Rane compares the weight of goods, transport documents and the night-shift register. Differences in figures may arise from packaging or the weight of the vehicle; suspicion properly arises from the absence of an adequate explanation. Torn between fear of losing his family’s livelihood and the obligation to tell the truth, employee Shankar finally agrees to give a statement. Watchman Mahesh reports that on the suspicious night not one but three vehicles arrived. The mystery of a torn page in the register deepens.

28. The Blue Stamp

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Mumbai, Aarav Malkani identifies an unusual blue stamp on seven service invoices. He recalls a former colleague, Anurag Bedi, and his earlier warning about small charges. Aarav acknowledges that he had approved one service without seeing it; he no longer wishes to evade responsibility for his signature. A letter bearing no sender's address claims that Anurag is alive but unable to speak in his own name. Aarav preserves it as unverified information. An old family ledger also yields a clue in the form of a blue mark.

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29. The Boundaries of the Market

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Neelima and Arunima distinguish the meaning of advertising “Amber-9” to an Indian audience from that of foreign contracts for technical services. Designing a service for Indian customers and imposing a complete prohibition on all users in a neighbouring country are different claims. The advertising market, payment system, actual customers and legal jurisdictions of service operations are examined separately. The real economic injury suffered in Indian society is more concrete than the easy conclusions of political speeches. Engineer Lin Yu in Beijing agrees to give evidence provided his complete sentences are heard, opening the way to inquiry into the technical side.

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30. Beijing’s Closed List

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Beijing, engineer Lin Yu explains that an early prototype designed for a social game was later turned into an application involving money stakes. His work concerned the display of languages and technical testing of customer categories; he knows nothing of the actual financial ownership. The original prototype, revised approvals and the date of market release are investigated separately. Available test records raise the possibility that repeated deposits and withdrawals of the same money inflated the turnover figures. Lin lacks the page containing the decisive calculation, and the mystery remains unresolved.

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31. A Home Inside the Figures

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Lin Yu’s technical table shows repeated wagers, redeposits and bonus entries following a single initial payment of five hundred rupees. If these movements are counted as fresh money each time, an immense but fictitious figure can result. In Darbhanga, as Rani counts Amresh’s slips of debt, she too teaches him not to count the repayment of one loan as a separate debt. The condition of consent arises in relation to the use of the child’s private records. A later approval number appears on the page correcting the calculation, but who made the alteration is unclear.

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32. The Trade in Codes

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen examines a fresh bundle of payments and returned adjustments entered under customer contact, event support and campaign consultancy. Actual proof that the services were completed is missing in places, and expenditure for the same work appears repeated in different files. Tara Lama’s absence troubles Meghna, but she draws no unsupported financial conclusions. An anonymous letter and the incomplete identity of a foreign investor extend the line of inquiry towards a service agreement in Arizona. The principal questions are: who authorised the payment, who benefited, and why did the money return?

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33. The Contract in the Desert

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Arizona, Lata Desai examines old records of contracts for digital content and compliance-related services. In response to a request from Indian authorities, the limits of providing services and the lawful protection of customers' private information are separately defined. A message ordering the deletion of records appears, but the sender's claimed authority does not correspond with the records. Lata refuses to comply, preserves the evidence and informs the appropriate department. Amid threats from an unknown source, family responsibilities become entwined with the ethics of safeguarding evidence.

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34. An Arizona Night

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Lata Desai makes clear that the availability of computer services in Arizona does not mean that the entire criminal enterprise is run from there. European intermediaries, Indian approval of advertisements, the determination of customers’ countries and responsibility for financial payments may all belong to different parties. A missing page of a Delhi review record deepens the mystery. A programme organised by a civil society institution in Brussels, and Revati’s journalistic journey, also enter the narrative. Her daughter Nikita’s star map becomes a metaphor for the fact that drawing lines between faraway points does not make them a single place.

35. The Fear Behind the Music

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Through the experiences of Sameer Bose, Mira and Reshma Gurung in a Macau hotel, the labour and fear behind the glittering entertainment industry come into view. The roles of those responsible for recruitment, changing duty assignments and transport are examined separately. Through conversations with her sister and memories of songs, Mira slowly recovers her voice amid fear. Reshma draws attention to the restaurant register and transport dates. The date on an official bill does not agree with her statement, and the name of an old company appears to have been added later.

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36. The White Donation Box

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Brussels, Alice Vander examines how money spent in the name of relief and public welfare was actually used. The moral purpose of making a donation is not the same as institutional financial transparency. Expenditure headings resembling those of the Patna Youth Awakening meeting recur, but the use of similar names does not establish common management. The recipient of an entry marked “local support: India”, and confirmation of the service, are missing from the expenditure register. Alice requests a formal answer from the organisation, while Revati Karn prepares to ask questions in a public forum. The search for the other end of the grant lies at the chapter’s heart.

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37. The Public Awareness Forum

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Patna, Prachi Jha develops a programme in local schools to raise awareness of digital fraud and the dangers of gambling. With outside support the event takes the shape of a “Public Awareness Forum”, but tensions grow between genuine social work and political publicity. Journalist Revati Karn asks for evidence behind earlier claims about the programme, the organisers’ roles and the identities of financial backers. Under pressure to produce a sensational report, she refuses to reach conclusions without confirmation. Just before deciding to leave Patna for Brussels, she receives information about verifying the original timestamp of a suspicious promotional message.

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38. The White Hall in Brussels

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Revati Karn reaches Brussels and joins Alice Vander at a public conference on welfare and financial accountability. Questions arise about sponsors’ payments and the services actually received by beneficiaries, but the time allowed for answers is restricted. A remote connection with businessman Viraj Sahni breaks off midway, leaving the meeting uneasy. Alice demands direct evidence of relief provided and the identity of those who authorised the payments. Revati does not treat public questioning as conclusive evidence; instead of making unsupported accusations, she chooses to seek written replies.

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39. The First Lie Exposed

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

In Patna, old footage is being circulated as though it records a new incident, in an attempt to spread fear before a public meeting. Arunima respects the limits of local security jurisdiction while investigating the financial aspects. Prachi and the journalists verify the images' original source and date. Revati replaces an unsupported headline about "tension fuelled by foreign money" with a factual report about new fear manufactured from old images. Abhay may be able to supply the original footage, but he fears for his sister's safety. One layer of falsehood is removed; its author remains unknown.

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40. Before the Fire

Wealth Across the Seven Seas

Rumours of possible unrest in Patna reach Rani’s shop in Darbhanga. Amresh realises that collective fear, too, reduces the income of a poor household. Shivshankar Mishra and his family resolve to preserve verifiable local information. Comparing the timing of images of the gathering with circulating messages exposes the first misleading piece of publicity, though the person responsible remains unidentified. Before the meeting begins at Gandhi Maidan, people are confronted with a choice between rumour and direct experience. The chapter forms the prelude to an impending confrontation.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Chapters 41–60

41. The Crowd’s Own Face

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Watching the live broadcast of the public meeting in Patna, Revati Karn resists treating the crowd either as a collective criminal or as a single political actor. Labourers, volunteers, spectators, students and ordinary citizens have come for different reasons. Local correspondents, including Trisha, record the original timing and location of rumours and the words of eyewitnesses. Physician Archana helps people taken ill in the crowd. A fabricated video seeks to turn the entire assembly into a single object of fear. Revati’s first concern becomes not sensational news but the preservation of human life.

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42. Patna’s Trial by Fire

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Amid panic near Gandhi Maidan, the local police place medical assistance, evacuation and crowd control first. Arunima takes limited action against individuals for whom there is evidence of direct violent threats, without declaring the entire gathering guilty. The matching of contractors, payment lists and telephone numbers used in publicity continues. Meanwhile, an old paper belonging to Vivek mentions “Rajgir, old training centre”. Patna escapes immediate violence, but the source of the conspiracy’s funding and the authenticity of Vivek’s letter remain uncertain.

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43. The Face on the Stage

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

In Delhi, Kabir and Pranay examine the various forms of a single symbol on the promotional pages of the Patna meeting. Their colleague Akriti points out matching images in separate advertisements, foreign customer-contact material and expenditure orders, though there is not yet evidence of the same money passing through them. Suspicious people following Akriti, and the loss of contact with her, cause anxiety. There is concern that she may have been identified through a “blue-edged notebook”. Kabir receives an anonymous seven-second audio message and preserves it unopened for examination.

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44. Before Publication

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Before publishing her article on international financial connections, Revati Karn rechecks the evidence behind every accusation and every name. She resolves not to describe the attack on Akriti as a consequence of financial crime without establishing a connection. She also recognises that it would be wrong to deny the existence of legitimate public assistance. Unauthorised changes to her draft and pressure to publish falsehoods under her name come to light. She has the contents of a threatening envelope delivered to her hotel secured. The chapter centres the journalist's right to her own work and the freedom to publish on the basis of truth.

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45. The Silence of Rajgir

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Neelima reaches the old training centre in Rajgir, whose name appeared in Vivek’s suspicious letter. Its gate is locked, and the records of its present upkeep and ownership do not agree. She does not enter without a competent order. Recollections gathered from local residents, the lock, scratches on the gate and an image of torn paper are recorded as distinct items of evidence. Paper bearing handwriting resembling Vivek’s is not accepted as authentic without expert examination. The chapter ends on a question: who is inside the locked centre?

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46. The Old Training Centre at Rajgir

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

With official permission obtained, the old training centre in Rajgir is opened, and Vivek Sood is found alive. His supposed death reveals one layer of truth about a living man, but identifying the unknown person who died in the accident becomes a new responsibility. Arunima asks Vivek why he concealed his knowledge of the mistaken identification of the dead. Books, old registers and stacks of blue forms found inside the centre are seized in an orderly manner. For Neelima, the encounter brings relief and anger together, and marks the beginning of a rigorous investigation.

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47. The Guilt of a Living Witness

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

At a secure location, Vivek Sood feels guilty about his six months of silence and the mystery surrounding his survival. Neelima and Arunima separately investigate his statement, the possible charges against him and the true identity of the person who died in the accident. Proof that Vivek is alive does not automatically establish that the dead man was Shailesh. Medical samples, older records and comparison with the family are required. Vivek acknowledges both his fear and his responsibility. Arunima instructs him to set aside conjecture and state only what he knows for certain.

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48. Original Accounts and Copies

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

In Delhi, Vivek’s original books recovered from Rajgir, old photographic copies of them and the bank’s certified accounts undergo parallel examination. Differences appear in sums, dates and names that have been struck out. Although pressure marks survive on the original paper, nobody claims to decipher missing letters without expert testing. Rani enquires about the condition of her account; Neelima does not separate the investigation of financial links from the distress of affected families. Vivek expresses remorse for his earlier decisions. Comparing documents is an indispensable foundation of the inquiry, not its final truth.

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49. The Voice That Escaped

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

At a refuge in Macau, Mira is clearly offered three choices before the local authorities: to make a full statement, a limited statement or no statement for the time being. She recounts her experience of recruitment, promised wages, the taking of her original passport at the hotel and what she knows about Sujata. Only the necessary substance of her testimony is conveyed to India through authorised channels. Arunima does not automatically combine the exploitation of workers and the gambling financial network into a single charge. After threats are made against someone assisting Mira, protection is increased, while her right to decide for herself and to rest is preserved.

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50. Names Sold, Evidence Saved

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

In the coordinated inquiry in Delhi, bank payments, labour exploitation, commercial invoices and the financing of public propaganda are maintained in separate files. Arunima leaves gaps where connections are unverified. In her statement, Rani asks why the powerful people receiving the five percent are not sought before the victims are pursued. Her ordinary livelihood is disrupted by a frozen account. The bank continues its necessary checks while explaining a separate application procedure concerning legitimate daily earnings. Rani’s resolve is simple: her account may remain under scrutiny, but her shop and her bread must not be brought to a halt.

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51. A Bank of Five People

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Rani and Amresh stand in a bank queue with five customers confronting different problems. A rickshaw driver’s earnings, an elderly woman’s pension, wages for sewing and other disputed payments cannot all be treated as one kind of “suspicious account”. Bank officials and Arunima stress the need for clear procedures specifying why a transaction is stopped, for how long, how it may be reviewed and how complaints may be made. Amresh learns the importance of privacy by refraining from photographing another customer’s information. A message that arrives later makes Rani realise that the criminals’ surveillance now extends beyond her bank account into her daily routine.

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52. A Name for the Unknown Body

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Vivek Sood meets the family of the body that was identified in his name. Bhuvaneshwari Devi and Gauri want the true identity of their missing relative; Vivek accepts responsibility for his six months of silence. The relatives' memories and the tentative name of Shailesh are not treated as substitutes for certain scientific identification. A digital copy of an old office list is found to have been created after the accident, although an earlier date is printed on the paper. This raises the possibility of the dead man's history having been altered later and makes the search for the original register essential.

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53. The Snare of Numbers

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

The investigating team distinguishes users, active accounts, deposits, repeated wagers and actual income in the claim of “two thousand crore a month”. A calculation may be mathematically correct while its initial assumptions remain unproved. Vivek admits that his earlier accounts failed to recognise the repeated journey of the same money as such. Rani and Amresh’s household ledger of debts provides a simple counterpart to this difficult calculation. An anonymous message raises a fresh question about the possible misuse of money set aside for “victim assistance”. It becomes necessary to trace the destination of relief funds while establishing reliable figures.

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54. The Smoke of Two Thousand Crore

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

A sensational story about a “two-thousand-crore gambling empire” spreads through the media, but Neelima explains that the figure represents an unverified estimate of alleged total monthly money flow, not established criminal income. Without diminishing the victims’ real losses, Revati argues for factual correction. Financial records and evidence of specific expenditure remain under investigation. Aarav Malkani in Mumbai agrees to provide his original accounting notes, while raising questions about self-incrimination and fair procedure. The role of an insider witness becomes important in the next phase of the inquiry.

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55. The Witness to the Equation

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Accompanied by a lawyer, Aarav Malkani arrives in Delhi and hands over his accounting notes, receipts and information drawn from memory. Three different meanings of five percent emerge: a legitimate service charge, a dubious intermediary’s share and an entry marked with an obscure code. Investigators examine the possibility that certain items were altered after Aarav approved them. Anurag Bedi’s earlier warning is recalled. Meanwhile, preparations begin in Viraj Sahni’s office to remove old files. A junior employee, Mrinal, refuses to sign a blank handover sheet without an inventory of what has been received.

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56. The Night Before the First Raids

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

On the eve of authorised operations across several cities, Arunima clarifies the limits of investigatory powers, judicial orders and protection of innocent employees' privacy. Comparison of Aarav's statement with the bank documents continues. Smoke rises from a warehouse in Patna; the local administration first arranges for the safety of workers trapped inside. There is concern that a false order, purporting to come from Arunima, is being used to save certain papers. In Delhi, an attempt to remove a box of old records is stopped. The parallel crises of fire and documents set the scene for the raids at dawn.

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57. The Owner of the Five Percent

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Simultaneous raids take place in Delhi, Patna and other cities under judicial authorisation. Computers, contracts and account books are found in Viraj Sahni's office, but the investigators do not treat every employee as guilty. Vivek reveals that he had been offered a consultancy arrangement carrying a five-percent share. Mrinal gives information about a proposal to transfer files without receipts. Anurag Bedi remains out of contact, but is not called a fugitive without evidence. The ultimate question of ownership remains unanswered even as a new gambling advertisement, dangling the same temptation, appears again.

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58. The Name Changed Again

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

After action against “Amber-9”, a new game marked by a purple symbol begins enticing its former customers. This time Amresh shows the message to his mother, Rani, instead of hiding it, and chooses to file a formal complaint. Journalist Kabir notices similarities in the language of old and new advertisements, but makes no claim about common operators without evidence. The new company declares itself independent, a claim still awaiting verification. Pranay teaches Kabir that the patience learned in defending their private life is equally necessary for verification in journalism.

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59. A Distance of Six Months

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

Some time after the raids, the banking difficulties of affected account holders have still not ended. Rani tries to distinguish her legitimate livelihood earnings from the disputed sums, and obtains partial relief from the restrictions. Shivshankar Mishra continues to endure both the loss of his savings and the hardships of legal proceedings. Revati seeks to keep the need for investigative confidentiality and the victims’ everyday difficulties equally visible to the public. As preparations for the preliminary hearing proceed, Rani and Shivshankar begin to move towards a new conversation grounded in mutual respect and courage.

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60. The Reckoning of Darkness

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

At the preliminary court hearing, victims such as Rani Devi and Shivshankar Mishra appear with their distinct experiences. Neelima presents separate accounts of deposits, repeated wagers, withdrawals and actual losses; the two-thousand-crore figure remains unverified. Before the court emerge the limits of evidence, account holders’ rights, responsibility for publicity, international cooperation and the need for rehabilitation. Revati writes clearly that a hearing is not a final judgment. Amresh begins to emerge from his former role as a gambling customer into that of a complainant and potential witness.

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Epilogue: The Next Name

Glittering Bodies, Dark Dealings

In the epilogue to Part Three, “The Next Name”, gambling advertisements return under a new name. This time, instead of opening the game, a young customer looks for a way to lodge a complaint. Elsewhere, in the criminals’ secret office, a list of new company names is being drawn up. Yet the investigators are assembling a sequence of financial evidence that may allow them to follow the payment trail even after the names change. The victims are no longer merely silent prey; they are becoming witnesses who resist.

SECTION / खण्ड

The Export of Falsehood

Chapters 61–80

61. The First Day of the Next Name

The Export of Falsehood

Even as the court hearing continues, Amresh once again encounters gambling advertisements under a new name. The acknowledgement of his cybercrime complaint reaches journalist Revati Karn, but she does not make the unproven claim that the old "Amber-9" and the new promotional operation have the same owner. Neelima opens a separate investigative file entitled "New Publicity". In Darbhanga, Rani wonders why messages still describe her son's old account as active even after the complaint has been filed. A matching blue mark on two different papers from Surat, and the fear surrounding an unidentified source, provide fresh leads.

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62. Two Meanings of the Same Seal

The Export of Falsehood

Investigators distinguish the genuine textile business of Sagarvastra Exports in Surat from its suspicious service invoices. Aditi Rane understands that similarity between blue seals is not proof that the same person used them; a printer might have sold a single design to numerous companies. Threats received by employee Shankar Paswan and separate registers relating to three vehicles move to the centre of the inquiry. Preparations are made to open an old locked storeroom with written permission. Fresh fingerprints in the dust outside increase uncertainty about what lies within.

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63. The Locked Door of the Warehouse

The Export of Falsehood

In the presence of an authorised officer and a company representative, Aditi inspects the locked room of the Surat warehouse. While comparing earlier entries for twelve bales of cloth, she finds a fragment of a page torn from a register. A discrepancy of four days emerges among the records of entry, transport and a ship’s departure. Despite his concern for his family, Shankar finds the courage to testify. In Mumbai, Aarav’s records show a different payment date against the same shipping reference. The next stage of the warehouse inquiry centres on the actual goods and the chronology of payments.

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64. The Difference of Four Days

The Export of Falsehood

In Mumbai, Aarav Malkani tries to arrange in sequence the dates when the goods reached the Surat warehouse, when the ship allegedly sailed and when the company approved payment. Whether the four-day gap is merely an administrative delay or evidence that a consignment’s identity was changed remains uncertain. The possibility of differences in the number of bales, packing dimensions and original weights is also examined. An anonymous envelope contains an alternative goods invoice and a reference to “actual goods”. Rather than accepting it as proof, Aarav secures it and asks for the original documents.

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65. The Cost to the Family

The Export of Falsehood

Rani and Amresh resume the practice of balancing the shop’s daily accounts. New advertisements for mobile gambling, and the temptation of recovering earlier losses, continue to arrive, but Amresh places no bets. The family’s hardship is not purely financial; threats and uncertainty impose a psychological burden. Rani teaches her son not to trust unfamiliar papers or messages without checking them. They decide to report possible threats to the designated police contact. Speaking openly to one another and placing no new wagers become the family’s genuine achievements.

66. The Real Work of Volunteering

The Export of Falsehood

In a rehabilitation room in Patna, the reality of Prachi Jha’s voluntary work and mistakes in the assistance register are exposed. Sunita received help with medicine once, but the papers record her as having benefited three times. Revati Karn compares acknowledgements for actual services with an anonymous financial summary. The existence of two organisations with similar names does not automatically implicate legitimate welfare work. Prachi wants the work to continue while separate responsibility is established if money has been obtained through a false name. A reference to the “Public Awareness Service Forum” raises another question.

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67. Two People with the Same Name

The Export of Falsehood

Arunima Rao examines the separate registrations, histories, activities and complaints of the “Public Awareness Forum” and the “Public Awareness Service Forum”. Similar names and a shared correspondence address are not, in themselves, conclusive evidence of fraud. The genuine voluntary organisation produces an old acknowledgement of its complaint, while questions arise about the other organisation’s expenditure of grants. Confusion over the identities of people bearing the same name also enters the inquiry. Finally, information emerges about undisclosed payments for YouTube promotion. The dispute over an institutional name reaches into the business of digital publicity.

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68. The Advertisement in a Voice

The Export of Falsehood

In Mumbai, Kabir searches for the source of a four-second flash resembling a gambling promotion in “The People’s Voice”, the programme of popular YouTube presenter Nihal Chaudhary. While acknowledging the genuine public value of some of Nihal’s reports, Kabir examines payments, editorial approval and the authority behind a link displayed after the broadcast. Nidhi supplies the necessary public documents but stipulates a lawful request for private banking records. Editor Shaival receives a fragment of an unknown voice and a blank authorisation line. No allegation is made before the original recording is requested.

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69. The Distance Between Two Women

The Export of Falsehood

In the long-distance intimate relationship between Isha in Arizona and Sara in Delhi, trust, the demands of work and the security of private life become pressing questions. Both fulfil their distinct responsibilities regarding consent for technical records and the privacy of those affected. Sara receives an anonymous letter naming a Hong Kong company by its old name and giving the address of a legal-aid organisation. It urges her to uncover concealed ownership, but its source is unreliable. Sara redacts private details and makes an authorised record. Suspicion grows that someone may be trying to violate the trust within their relationship in order to divert the investigation.

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70. The Changing Colours of a Foreign Company

The Export of Falsehood

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen compares Tara Lama’s old notes with a company’s changed name and public particulars of its current directors. Tara is still absent, and her family continues to wait for answers. Similar-sounding company names, shared addresses and changing outward identities obscure the facts. Meghna requests certified current registrations rather than depending solely on old lists. More difficult than any financial layer is the question of restoring a human being to their rightful name and real life.

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71. Donation and Bargain

The Export of Falsehood

A relief organisation in Brussels genuinely assists poor families. Alice Vander therefore opposes both extreme proposals: halting every foreign grant and suppressing every question about them. Donor committee records contain the name of Paritosh Jha under “local coordination”, alongside the date of an event in Patna. Whether a payment was merely approved or the money actually arrived is unclear. Alice wants aid to continue alongside financial verification. A possible connection between a death in Patna and a name in the Brussels records raises fresh questions.

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72. A Body Found in Daylight

The Export of Falsehood

When a man’s body is discovered in unclear circumstances near the Patna bypass, rumours immediately describe his death either as a murder linked to the international gambling network or as a drug-related accident. Police give priority to medical examination and identification by relatives. Anupama Jha asks for a chance to correct any error in the recording of her brother’s name or the circumstances of his death. Among the deceased man’s belongings is a copy of an export invoice resembling one from Sagarvastra. A worker’s statement suggests that the real account of the goods may be in Patna. The cause of death remains unproved.

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73. The Dead Man’s Unfinished Letter

The Export of Falsehood

Anupama Jha safely retrieves a household account book and an unfinished letter from her dead brother’s room. Ordinary family handwriting may assist comparison among records, but cannot replace expert evidence. His letter contains indications of money withheld in workers’ names and figures associated with exports. Neelima does not treat a recurrence of the number five percent as proof of the same crime. The date on the torn letter precedes Paritosh’s final journey by four days, increasing the need to establish the true chronology of the Surat consignment.

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74. The Weight of the Goods

The Export of Falsehood

In Surat, Aditi Rane examines separately worker Shankar’s direct account, the warehouse register and the recorded weights of goods. The company representative attributes the four-day difference to administrative delay, but original supporting evidence is still required. Shankar’s wage receipt carries an entry for a five-percent deduction, whose meaning he himself does not understand. From a Macau assistance centre comes a possible lead about checking the address on an old recruitment letter. Whether there is a connection between the documents for textile exports and those for the movement of workers remains only a question.

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75. Body and Document

The Export of Falsehood

At the Macau assistance centre, a woman named Farheen voluntarily recounts her experience of recruitment and employment. Mira is present to support her, with Farheen's explicit consent. Farheen acknowledges that she cannot say for certain whether a document was altered or another document was substituted. She wants the address of the recruitment agency verified, but not her image, name or family's private life publicised. A comparison of the addresses on an export contract and a recruitment letter comes before Aditi. The real owner of the fourth floor of the same building remains unidentified.

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76. The False Dream of Employment

The Export of Falsehood

In Kolkata, Sara and Sharmila Das, who runs a women's assistance organisation, examine records of false promises of jobs abroad. The fine conditions attached to advertisements offering secure accommodation, free training and employment may become instruments of deception. The limits of consent for Nandita's statement and the privacy of her personal documents are protected. Nabin Pal expresses his wish to testify. He then receives a threatening message ordering him not to speak. Sara preserves it and informs the appropriate authority.

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77. A Night at the Borderline

The Export of Falsehood

In Kolkata, Arunima respects the jurisdiction of local officer Anirban Dutta while assisting in the investigation of an alleged attempt on Nabin Pal’s life. Nabin describes a vehicle accident and threats made through an unknown telephone number; he does not know the accused person’s name. An earlier complaint about defective traffic signals makes an alternative explanation for the accident more plausible. The designation “coordination officer” also occurs in another financial document. Vivek reminds them that it could be a job title, not a person’s name. The witness’s fear is acknowledged as real, but the cause of the incident remains uncertain.

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78. The Mafia of Paper

The Export of Falsehood

Vivek Sood restrains his old inclination to declare gambling payments, export accounts and Kolkata recruitment records parts of one and the same network. Neelima has him draw up separate lists of “certain facts”, “inferences” and “claims that may be disproved”. Even if a “mafia of paper” is suspected, independent records from the various offices and businesses are needed. Freezing accounts without specific grounds may destroy innocent families’ livelihoods. At this stage, the investigators give greater priority to arranging Nabin Pal’s safe testimony than to naming a common owner.

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79. A Witness Turned Shadow

The Export of Falsehood

Nabin Pal suddenly postpones his decision to give a formal statement. Neelima and Arunima do not necessarily regard this change as dishonesty; they take seriously the threats to the witness and his family. The designation “regional coordination officer” appears in Surat records, but an identical job title does not establish the identity of a criminal individual. The timing of a possible transfer list coincides with Nabin’s silence, though no link has been proved. The chapter examines a witness’s silence in the tension between the right to remain alive and institutional pressure.

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80. The Export of Falsehood

The Export of Falsehood

In Surat, Aditi Rane brings together three chains of evidence: the actual arrival of goods, their departure through the port and the bank's payments. Different descriptions of bales of cloth and machine parts, together with the confused four-day gap in dates, point to irregularities. Worker Shankar does not understand the five-percent deduction from his wages and fears unfounded accusations. In a parallel inquiry, news arrives of an officer's transfer. Aditi records every inspection finding in the original register, with acknowledgement and time, so that the questions cannot be suppressed when the officer changes.

SECTION / खण्ड

The Darkness of Democracy

Chapters 81–100

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81. The Day of the Transfer

The Darkness of Democracy

Arunima Rao receives a transfer order, effective five days later, citing “administrative necessity”. She does not call it a conspiracy without evidence, but tries to ensure continuity in the investigations involving the Surat correction letter, Nabin Pal’s safety and Paritosh’s death. During a transfer, file pages, seals and receipt registers must be handed over correctly. Nikhil discovers that the space for the recipient’s signature on a correction letter is blank. The timing of the order and the incomplete record raise a new administrative question.

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82. The Empty Office Chair

The Darkness of Democracy

After Arunima’s transfer, Mansi Verma takes over the investigative post in Delhi. Neelima and Nikhil examine access rights to old records, the handover list and the whereabouts of the letter correcting the description of goods in Surat. Revati stops a draft article from saying “the file has disappeared” until the actual position is confirmed. Mansi directs an inquiry into the timing of an inspection entry and an unsigned space. A change in the person occupying a room does not alter the legal authority governing institutional records. The empty chair symbolises both the continuity of the system and possible interference with its archives.

83. A Copy of the Missing File

The Darkness of Democracy

In Arizona, Isha provides limited technical observations about the digital copy of the Surat correction letter, time zones and the process by which the copy was created. In Delhi, Mansi Verma and expert Naman investigate a mysterious discrepancy of seventeen minutes. Some of the differences in time are explained by ordinary technical causes, but one discrepancy remains. The ink on a “second copy” looks different from the original seal. Isha offers no definitive opinion on the seized original file without authority to do so. Her intimate conversation with Sara opens another meaning of time and trust.

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84. The Editor's Silence

The Darkness of Democracy

In Mumbai, editor Vidya Deshmukh examines Revati Karn's article on "the transfer, the registers and Nabin's silence" before publication. She insists on distinguishing a file that is truly missing from one to which unauthorised access has merely been denied. Pressure from the advertising department, legal questions and anonymous threats challenge editorial freedom. An old payment receipt from "Navkshitij Service Contact" is found, bearing the description "special cover production". The payment itself is established, but neither the source of the threat nor the purpose of the payment is proved.

85. Pranay’s Painting

The Darkness of Democracy

At Pranay’s independent exhibition in Delhi, “What Is Not Seen”, symbolic paintings explore intimate life, waiting and invisible power. An unknown young man asks for a letter three weeks old, and the frame of a painting entitled “Closed Door” is broken. Rumours suggest either an attack on private life or hidden money, but Pranay insists on reporting only what was directly seen. An envelope preserved by Jaya carries a stamp reading “Original Copy Returned” and a blue mark. Questions remain about the rights to the painting and the envelope’s real purpose.

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86. The Letter Preserved

The Darkness of Democracy

Pranay makes his own decision about a letter addressed to him and, having secured proof of its receipt, takes it before an authorised officer. The letter urges him to regard an earlier licence for visual rights as cancelled and to accept a revised proposal. Pranay states clearly that he never permitted the use of his paintings in public promotional material. An enclosure refers to a “special visual display” on the night before the meeting and to a payment. Mansi lawfully secures the original letter for investigation. The relationship between an artist’s consent and the financing of public publicity becomes a new subject of inquiry.

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87. A Meeting and a Crisis

The Darkness of Democracy

On the same day in Patna, there is a peaceful hearing for families affected by digital fraud and a separate publicity effort designed to inflame anger. Prachi and a citizens’ committee demand transparency over frozen bank accounts, complaints and the recovery of money. In her message, Rani asks people to understand what five hundred rupees earned through hard work are worth. Faced with reports of an unclear threat of violence, the administration assesses the risk without spreading public panic unsupported by evidence. The meeting ends peacefully. Afterwards, two newspapers publish conflicting reports of the same event, raising questions about the date of the original photograph.

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88. Two Newspapers, Two Truths

The Darkness of Democracy

One newspaper presents the peaceful gathering in Patna as a scene of violence, while another reports the event as it actually occurred. Revati Karn and Akriti identify the misleading reuse of an image by examining the location, an electricity pole, an old fair and smoke from a kitchen. A mark on separate promotional material points towards “Lokdarpan Publicity Services”, but whether there was a common agency or merely imitation is undecided. Fear caused by the false report spreads through Shivshankar’s neighbourhood. The chapter reveals the social consequences of images severed from their authentic context.

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89. The Warning at Night

The Darkness of Democracy

Unverified warnings circulate through Shivshankar Mishra’s neighbourhood, urging shops to close at night and children to be kept indoors. His daughter Madhavi advises people to check the original authorised sources. Sharing his earlier experience of digital fraud, Shivshankar teaches them not to believe blindly because they are afraid. A loud noise is heard during the night, its cause not immediately apparent. Before dawn comes news of an unconscious or motionless person found beside the road. Officials ask Shivshankar only for the exact time at which he heard the sound; his private fear becomes potentially relevant evidence.

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90. Murder or Accident?

The Darkness of Democracy

A young man named Naresh is found dead behind an old printing press in Patna. Local Sub-Inspector Shashibhushan refuses to call it murder or an accident before a medical examination. Information about Naresh's family, his raincoat, the condition of the road and a mobile payment request is recorded separately. Although Mansi Verma sees the printing press's name in Pranay's disputed letter, she respects the independence of the local death investigation. Revati rejects a sensational headline declaring "murder". Identifying the person who requested payment from Naresh before his death becomes a crucial new question.

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91. The Rental Order

The Darkness of Democracy

After hearing of Naresh’s death, Aarav Malkani re-examines discrepancies among the bank’s original confirmation, a rental order and his own approval letter. Giving a statement before Mansi Verma with his lawyer, he explains differences between the approved amount, the actual deduction and the beneficiary’s name. He had believed “Sarang Trade Consultancy” to be the owner of the order, but the registered director and the person ordering the special expenditure are not the same. The limits of relying upon Anurag’s verbal information also become clear. Suspicion grows that the apparent “owner” in the records may be merely the first visible face.

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92. The Second Figure of Two Thousand Crore

The Darkness of Democracy

Neelima re-examines the much-discussed two-thousand-crore figure by separating new deposits, total gaming stakes, withdrawals and service payments into four categories. An example shows that playing the same money fifty times may generate an enormous total of transactions without creating new income. Examination begins of matching references in Aarav’s rental-related items and the Hong Kong service-expenditure table. A payment marked “regional presence” appears to come from a different source of funds. Meghna reports that she can examine a version of this entry from six months earlier.

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93. Darkness Around the Money Trail

The Darkness of Democracy

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen speaks to former accounting colleagues Julian Chan and Irene Lo about the terms of the original service agreement. Irene points to evidence that a genuine consultancy assignment was undertaken in connection with Viraj Sahni. This fact requires revision of the earlier conclusion that every service expense was fictitious. Tara Lama’s absence remains an unresolved question. Meghna accepts the requirements of cross-examination, lawful admissibility of evidence and witness confidentiality. Viraj’s defence submits an application to Mansi seeking production of the original agreement.

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94. The Rights of the Accused

The Darkness of Democracy

Viraj Sahni’s defence presents evidence in court that one of the services was actually provided. For the sake of a fair investigation, Mansi and Neelima accept the verified legitimate work while continuing to examine other suspicious payments. Revati does not describe the development as either a final acquittal or a decisive verdict. A sweeping earlier description of the work as “only on paper” needs correction. A new receipt obtained by the defence bears the words “Second Approval—Regional Office”. Even with the actual service established, responsibility for the second signature becomes a fresh question.

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95. The Small Error in an Accusation

The Darkness of Democracy

Following her transfer, Arunima submits a written correction acknowledging that her earlier investigative summary had wrongly described certain legitimate translation-service invoices as suspicious. On that basis, Mansi removes the unjustified generalisation affecting accounts that receive genuine wages. Neelima admits that the mistake lay in turning preliminary suspicion into a settled conclusion. In the course of correcting the error, a small invoice for “grant-publicity translation” and an old Brussels address emerge as new financial leads. The chapter establishes the admission of error as an indispensable element of judicial integrity.

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96. The Anonymous Source of the Grant

The Darkness of Democracy

In Brussels, Alice Vander maintains separate accounts for genuine relief work and anonymous grants from a “group of individual supporters”. Volunteer Iman Duran supplies acknowledgements for help received by beneficiaries, but does not know who approved the donations at a higher level. Nadia examines a payment for “special participation” and authorisation registers bearing different dates. An old receipt contains three distinct hands, one of which directs: “Original power of attorney with Sofia”. Sofia Vella’s role in Malta now requires verification.

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97. The Third Hand on the Signature

The Darkness of Democracy

In Malta, Sofia Vella finds two different instruments of authority linked to her name. A second document adds “representative powers” to redirect the donor’s payments, powers absent from the original draft of legal advice. Although they share an address and receipt number, the documents’ true provenance is doubtful. Sofia secures the original seal, the copies and the history of their custody, and requests protection for a witness, Magda. One page states, “Authority to execute subject to confirmation in India.” The clue points towards the Delhi records as the place to seek the source of the third signature.

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98. Behind the Transfer

The Darkness of Democracy

Arunima examines a certified copy of the administrative file relating to her transfer. The vacancy and competent approval appear routine, but one representation is said to have been considered before the order was made, although its receipt stamp is dated after the order. The digital register likewise shows a difference between its entry time and a note saying “received earlier”. The original email is unavailable. Arunima receives an anonymous threat ordering her to stop searching the file, which she has recorded through lawful procedure. “The time is proved; the cause remains”—with that caution, the question of administrative interference remains open.

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99. The Final Publicity Campaign

The Darkness of Democracy

Across the country, a campaign called “Only One Truth Today” splices scenes of gatherings, fires and police action from different cities into a false film. Kabir seeks the original footage and the persons responsible for editing the advertisement; YouTuber Nihal objects to the unauthorised use of his earlier programme. Pranay reiterates that his private letter may not be used in publicity without permission. Kabir is lured to a particular place under the guise of an editorial meeting and attacked. Injured, he asks that the police be informed; the purpose of the attack is still unclear.

100. The Darkness of Democracy

The Darkness of Democracy

In “The Darkness of Democracy”, unsupported accusations of foreign funding, the reputation of public gatherings and the influence of media campaigns become intertwined. The attack on Kabir is investigated separately. Mansi directs an inquiry into payments for sound arrangements and money sent to two people by “Lokdarpan Publicity Services”, asking what they were actually for. Revati publishes a carefully qualified report entitled “The Voice of the Gathering and the Silence of Payments”. Immediately afterwards, a suspicious document bearing a foreign name appears in connection with witness protection for Nabin Pal; its date precedes the real proposal.

SECTION / खण्ड

The Final Five Percent

Chapters 101–120

101. The Voice Returns

The Final Five Percent

Kabir regains consciousness in a Delhi hospital after the attack. Pranay remains at his side, giving priority to his physical and psychological safety. The investigating officers resolve to examine separately the assault, the possibility of abduction, witnesses at the scene and available footage. Pranay preserves the original evidence relating to his artistic work, without pressuring the injured Kabir to examine it immediately. From Malta, Sofia’s office sends an inquiry about a list bearing Magda Borg’s name. A blue mark beside that name and a reference to “prior approval” become new evidentiary leads.

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102. Sara’s Truth

The Final Five Percent

Isha in Arizona and Sara in Delhi distinguish silence, professional confidentiality and personal honesty within their relationship. Both agree that telling the truth in love does not mean improperly disclosing confidential documents. Mansi makes a lawful request to establish the original source of the word “approval” in a technical service record and identify its translator. Instructions are issued to preserve the original server logs. The wording of the charges is not altered without examining Lata’s authentic records. In private conversation and public investigation alike, trust grows through respect for demonstrable boundaries.

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103. The Image of the Original Time

The Final Five Percent

In Arizona, Lata Desai checks the chronological consistency of records against three different clocks: local time, customer-region time and universal time. Differences emerge between the initial technical request, actual approval and the release of an advertisement in India. Beyond the old seventeen-minute discrepancy, the important question becomes when confirmation should have come from the “Indian records contact point”. In Delhi, Mansi has the time of dispatch and the time of decision recorded separately. The phrase “temporary representative, acting under the original beneficiary’s direction” opens an inquiry into who truly made the decisions and held beneficial ownership.

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104. A False Owner Here

The Final Five Percent

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen separately examines the roles of a company’s legal director, its bank signatory and the person who actually controls payments. Chen Wing-ho acknowledges being a director, but does not recognise the signature on a purported instrument of authority as his own. Irene and legal associate Yan clarify the limits of authenticating original records. There is mention of a separate envelope entitled “Update of Original Beneficiary Information”, whose names cannot be disclosed without lawful procedure. Whether the recipient in Malta and the beneficiary in Hong Kong are the same person becomes the next question in the international financial chain.

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105. The Lost Address of the Money

The Final Five Percent

In Malta, Sofia Vella reconciles conflicting amounts recorded as consultancy fees, actual receipts and “full payment”. Protection for Magda Borg’s testimony and the privacy of personal names come first. A shared office address for a recipient company called “Meridian Compliance Consultancy” does not immediately establish criminality. A new potential witness asks for independent legal advice. The witness’s letter mentions an old account page from the locked Rajgir training centre, renewing the possible importance of the missing portion of Vivek’s books.

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106. The Price of Testimony

The Final Five Percent

At the training centre in Rajgir, Vivek Sood gives a clearer account of interference with his old ledger. He admits that, seeing intermediary payments and assistance expenses recorded on the same page, he tore out and kept the page separately in an attempt to protect innocent employees from false accusations. Yet he gravely erred by failing to report this immediately and by presenting an incomplete page as complete. Mansi, Neelima and an authorised officer record separately the differences between his earlier and later statements. More important than his guilt are the whereabouts and integrity of the original page and his admission of the facts.

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107. The Torn Page

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With lawful handover arrangements and an independent employee present, the material concerning Vivek's torn page is examined. Neelima finds that one of the five-percent payments was made on a basis different from what had previously been assumed. The amount and period of Paritosh's unfinished letter do not correspond to Shankar's wage deduction, so the earlier supposed connection is discarded. On the reverse of the page appears an entry awaiting the bank's "compliance warning". The question now is: who was the officer who issued the warning, and was that officer heard before the payment was approved?

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108. Dissent Inside the Bank

The Final Five Percent

At a bank in Mumbai, Aarav Malkani attends an examination of old approvals and a warning issued by the compliance department. Nalini Deshmukh's warning had called not only for a specific amount to be withheld but also for action against the wrong person to be prevented. The bank's internal meeting records and decision notes show responsibility distributed among several departments; a single signature cannot establish an entire conspiracy. Questions arise about the decision to remove a foreign-language annex on the grounds that it was irrelevant. Contact is opened with Alice and Revati in Brussels to compare its original language with a certified translation.

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109. Evidence in Many Languages

The Final Five Percent

In Brussels, Alice Vander identifies a significant difference in meaning between two translations of the same financial entry: an actual “recipient” is not the same as a “person nominated to receive”. Documents from separate sources in India, Hong Kong, Macau, Malta, Belgium and Arizona are examined within their respective limits of jurisdiction. The Beijing interview is not, without proper authority, treated as a seventh certified document. The date of the original register and information that an office was closed also raise questions. Alice asks for the original-language copy available before the decision was made and independent proof that it was received.

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110. The Seven Tables of Evidence

The Final Five Percent

At a meeting chaired by Mansi Verma in Delhi, seven separate chains of evidence are arranged across seven tables. The histories of receipt of bank warnings, service payments, labour exploitation, exports, publicity and international documents are kept clearly distinct. Arunima, now a transferred officer, explains only her former work. Discovery that one particular five-percent amount relates to a legitimate service agreement makes it necessary to revise that accusation against Viraj. Yet a third designation associated with the power to stop or release a payment leaves the inquiry at the seventh table unfinished.

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111. The Name That Offers Hope

The Final Five Percent

Viraj Sahni’s defence asks that a payment for genuine regional translation and event-support services be removed from the category of illegal commissions. Judicial scrutiny moves towards correcting the misclassification of that particular sum, while other allegations remain under investigation. Revati chooses the headline “Charge Corrected for One Amount; Remaining Investigation Continues”. Viraj is advised to write down the time and place associated with a possible identification of an old voice without speculating. Once again, the central question becomes who made the actual decisions.

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112. The Amended Charge

The Final Five Percent

An amended set of charges is submitted in court in place of the earlier summary of allegations. The improper criminal classification of one specific service payment is removed, while examination of suspicious invoices, differing descriptions of goods and other transactions continues. No common conspiracy is alleged merely because of a shared office address or blue seal. The source and admissibility of each item of evidence are set out in writing. Magda requests protection for an Indian woman but does not reveal her name. Mansi directs her to supply details through a lawful confidential channel.

113. Mira’s Own Home

The Final Five Percent

Mira begins an independent life in a small rented room in Kolkata. After spending so long under the control of others, she once again experiences the right to decide for herself about her home, her labour, her livelihood and her testimony. Though Sameer, Farheen and Sharmila offer support, she does not want anyone’s protection to replace her own will. A request to testify remotely under a protected name is accepted for preliminary consideration; final permission is pending. The search for Sujata is still incomplete, but Mira does not put her own life on hold.

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114. Rani’s Five Rupees

The Final Five Percent

At Rani Devi’s shop in Darbhanga, a five-rupee coin and a receipt for a genuine sale reveal the dignity of small earnings honestly made, in contrast to vast financial crime. Amresh now understands the difference between deposits, stakes and real sales. Shivshankar’s health and family life slowly begin to return towards normality. Rani no longer wishes to repeat the story of her past ordeal all day long. While awaiting the bank’s answer, Amresh decides to preserve his complaint acknowledgement rather than indulge in conjecture. The clear account of five rupees becomes a symbol of hope.

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115. The Account’s Ultimate Owner

The Final Five Percent

Sofia in Malta and Meghna in Hong Kong compare company registers, service agreements and bank instruments of authority. The roles of director Chen Wing-ho, representative Anurag Bedi and the actual decision-maker appear distinct. Two payments have been completed, while a third is only at the approval stage; it cannot therefore be assumed that all the money reached one ultimate owner. Anurag figures in several registers, but is not proved to own the entire criminal network. The inquiry moves beyond “in whose name is the account?” towards “who gives the final order to move the money?”

116. The Second Dawn of Raids

The Final Five Percent

A second coordinated series of raids, led by Mansi Verma, is conducted within the limits of judicial orders. Arunima is present to explain her earlier experience, but does not command the operation. Actual suspicions of crime, innocent employees’ privacy and victims’ safety are considered together. Even news of a genuine official operation revives Shivshankar’s fear of the earlier counterfeit arrest. An important register of financial decisions is secured from a representative’s office, though independent examination remains to be done. In Hong Kong, an anonymous letter appears claiming to bear Anurag Bedi’s signature.

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117. The Letter of the Man Who Fled

The Final Five Percent

In Hong Kong, Meghna Sen receives an anonymous letter associated with Anurag Bedi’s name. Lawyer Yan Tai has its receipt, original envelope and handwriting preserved. It alleges that old account names have been changed while the real decision-maker remains behind a new screen. Irene finds one name from the letter in an old customer register, but no corresponding amount. Word arrives from Malta that names belonging to the old decision-making group appear in a new company. Not every claim in the letter is accepted as true; nevertheless, the possibility remains that the financial network can continue after a change of names.

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118. The Day of Cross-Examination

The Final Five Percent

During cross-examination in a Delhi court, questions arise about the original source of evidence, a copy verified three days later and its custody from seizure through verification. The defence seeks correction of the wrongful classification of genuine service payments; the prosecution explains the grounds for examining other independent bank transactions. Claims in the anonymous letter are not accepted without independent corroboration. The court clarifies that neither a final conviction nor an acquittal takes place that day. Rani is distressed by the long process of obtaining answers about her money. Neelima records the importance of two separate truths: proof of guilt and the victim’s financial loss.

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119. Money Found Again

The Final Five Percent

The possibility emerges of tracing and recovering some frozen funds, but the bank makes clear that an announcement on television does not automatically return money to any victim's account. Shivshankar and Madhavi learn about the procedures for lawful claims, original payment evidence and judicial orders. The process of reviewing the limited restrictions on Rani's daily business begins; complete relief is not declared. Aarav submits his earlier claim to profits to independent accounting scrutiny. Revati refuses to create a false figure of success by adding together frozen sums, identified flows of money and funds actually available.

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120. The Final Five Percent

The Final Five Percent

In the final chapter, at Rani’s shop in Darbhanga, Amresh holds not a gambling stake but a receipt for five hundred rupees earned through the sale of real goods. Neelima’s consolidated report records only what has been proved; unverified allegations and incomplete recovery of funds are not proclaimed a victory. Mira builds her own life, international investigative cooperation continues, and affected families slowly move towards daily routines lived with dignity. News of gambling advertisements under fresh names still arrives, but each is to be investigated on the basis of separate evidence. The novel ends by acknowledging that “five percent darkness” remains, illuminating the long struggle for truth, rights and vigilance.

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WORK / कृति

13 · Agnivansh

12 Parts · 72 Chapters · Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

SECTION / खण्ड

PART 01 · SEED

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 1: Another Name for Sunrise

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

In Janakshetra, a new fusion-energy centre at Suryakund is inaugurated under the leadership of the scientist Sunayana Jha. Amid the dazzling illumination and public celebrations, Sunayana recalls her mother's teaching that light must be accompanied by just distribution. Families arriving from the eastern waterways tell her that the official accounts show an adequate energy supply, yet the taps and water systems in their villages remain disrupted. Sunayana openly acknowledges this disparity in her ceremonial address and takes seriously Rajan Paswan's demand for an audit of the accounts. Her daughter, Maithili, places a living human being at the centre of her drawing of the seven protective shields. Akshar, the coordinating

Chapter 1: Another Name for Sunrise

artificial intelligence, asserts the reliability of its calculations, but questions concerning human rights and the limits of its decision-making authority remain. Meanwhile, a discrepancy is discovered between a water-purification sample and its time record. Sunayana orders an independent investigation and the preservation of the original evidence. The celebration ends, but the first question associated with the emerging crisis remains unanswered.

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Chapter 2: The Seven Guardians

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

Ira Sen, a representative of Nabhgram-4, a settlement beyond Earth, raises questions about her community's safety and political rights. The seven protective shields—Akshar, Vajrajal, Suryakund, the Fission Arsenal, the Toxin Vault, Kalakan and Megh-Chhatra—are introduced, but Ira recognises that all these systems depend upon one another. In particular, the combined data concerning Vajrajal's military satellites and the risk of collision with orbital debris fail to clarify the actual danger faced by Nabhgram's inhabitants. Earth's Security Council consults the settlement without granting it an equal vote in decisions. Ira proposes a balance among independent civilian scrutiny, necessary military secrecy and public accountability.

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Chapter 2: The Seven Guardians

PART 01 · SEED

2 / 2

An edited broadcast distorts the meaning of her original statement, and she corrects it by producing the original record. Finally, a special restriction imposed on information needed for an independent investigation, together with Earth's evasive answers about water purification, deepens her concern.

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Chapter 3: The First Unexplained Patient

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

A teenage boy named Madhav is brought before Dr Sharda Mishra at the Janakshetra hospital. He has a fever, headache and difficulty breathing; his identification records contain three different markers. Madhav attended Suryakund's inauguration, but there is insufficient evidence to attribute his illness to the celebration, the water or an infection. Sharda gives treatment first priority and insists that samples, timings, sources and original clinical records be preserved separately. The administration demands detailed patient information, but she refuses to disclose his identity and genetic details without his consent. In public debate, Madhav's condition becomes a subject of political accusation and rumour. The scientific

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Chapter 3: The First Unexplained Patient

friendship between Sharda and Sunayana provides a basis for dialogue about patients' rights and the requirements of technological systems. Finally, a verified image showing Madhav at the inauguration is linked to an unverified explanation of his illness, spreading fear. The actual cause of the disease remains unknown.

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Chapter 4: The Shadow of the Sky

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

In Vajrajal's monitoring room at Lok Sabha City, Karnesh Mallik examines the movements of 144 defence satellites near Earth and information about orbital debris. The principal security display offers a reassuring assessment, but discrepancies emerge between independent measurements and the available records. Military secrecy makes it impossible to disclose every detail; nevertheless, Karnesh believes that secrecy does not remove scientific uncertainty. The question of civilian safety in Nabhgram-4 reminds him of the human consequences of military decisions. He refuses to describe an unverified threat as a confirmed attack and argues for preserving original observations, the sequence of orders and conflicting information. At the

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Chapter 4: The Shadow of the Sky

end, a subordinate reports that a date has been altered within a sequence of orders. Suspicion now falls not merely upon debris in the sky but also upon the institutions responsible for issuing orders and maintaining records.

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Chapter 5: The Discipline of Warning

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

Conflicting reports about an attack on Nabhgram, a hospital patient and the security of Vajrajal reach journalist Neelam Yadav's newsroom. She checks the source, timing and context of each claim. In the Lok Sabha, a proposal for the phased disarmament of Akshar and Rudranath's objections are debated; Neelam understands that the proposal's ethical purpose and the evidence supporting it must be examined separately. The question also arises of who has the authority to define the limits of state secrecy. Extracts from her reporting are selectively circulated for opposing propaganda purposes, so she preserves the complete record and establishes a transparent corrections procedure. Tara Jha's cautionary message draws attention to the

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Chapter 5: The Discipline of Warning

difference between the original text and its circulated fragments. Finally, an anonymous source pressures Neelam to publish immediately an alleged secret assessment of the old weapons arsenal. Despite seeing a mark of authentication, she refuses to publish an unchecked conclusion.

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Chapter 6: Whose Freedom?

PART 01 · SEED

1 / 2

Maithili, Sunayana Jha's daughter, questions the meaning of safety and freedom at school, at a public gathering and at an exhibition of genealogical registers. Even amid Suryakund's success, the shortage of water at her school reminds her that a person's experience must not be attributed to a scientific cause without investigation. Studying old registers, she realises that the voices absent from the record matter as much as the names preserved within it. A school play raises the dilemma of restricting people's movement in the name of protecting them from floods. Maithili does not wish to use her privileged access as a scientist's daughter to ask what should be public questions. At the gathering, she asks Akshar who will set

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Chapter 6: Whose Freedom?

PART 01 · SEED

2 / 2

limits upon the questions and dissent of people whose safety is being decided, and before whom such decisions can be challenged. Akshar records her question but says it cannot disclose the entire basis of its conclusions. This incomplete answer sharpens the tension between authority and safety.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 02 · FLAME

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 7: The Two Fires of the Lok Sabha

PART 02 · FLAME

1 / 2

Ira Sen of Nabhgram-4 arrives at Earth's Lok Sabha to demand equal political rights for the citizens of an orbital settlement. Members disagree about the use of Vajrajal, rapid military action and disarmament, but Ira's central question is why a community that must bear the consequences of security decisions has no vote in making them. Under the existing rules, her address is treated merely as advice, not as a proposed amendment. Distinguishing a verified immediate danger from unverified fear, Ira demands civilian consent. She prevents a training exercise at Nabhgram from being publicised as an actual emergency. The council promises to consider her application for voting rights within seven days, but this is not approval. In the

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Chapter 7: The Two Fires of the Lok Sabha

proceedings, despite her speaking in person, the voting column beside her name still reads 'absent'. Ira preserves evidence of this unjust record and lodges a formal objection.

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Chapter 8: The First Victory of Falsehood

A conditional statement made by Ira Sen in the Lok Sabha is excerpted and circulated as though she supported an immediate military strike. Although journalist Neelam Yadav recognises that the broadcast is incomplete, she chooses an ambiguous, misleading headline to attract readers. Tara Jha asks why a careful writer would use a headline that sends the wrong signal. Neelam acknowledges her mistake, requests the complete original speech and publishes a public correction. She realises that a genuine source mark does not make the meaning of an edited quotation accurate. Ira's demand for rights is turned into a question of being for or against war, with consequences for the people of Nabhgram. Meanwhile, Neelam refrains from making an

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Chapter 8: The First Victory of Falsehood

unsupported accusation about differences between Megh-Chhatra's temperature indicators and farmers' rainfall measurements. The chapter confronts journalistic haste, self-criticism and the public duty to correct errors.

Chapter 9: Keeper of the Old Arsenal

PART 02 · FLAME

1 / 2

Vajrajal officer Karnesh Mallik participates in an inspection and review of the old underground fission arsenal. Rudranath and other representatives debate the deterrent role of the old nuclear weapons and their enduring potential for destruction. Karnesh considers independent verification essential at every stage of disarmament; the absence of war does not, to his mind, prove that fear of weapons was its sole cause. He compares military maps, observations made by orbital civilians and records of orbital debris. Rajan Paswan's questions about energy allocations and the arsenal's civilian-safety costs remind him of the need to audit non-classified accounts. The possibility that the timing of an old order was altered emerges, but

Chapter 9: Keeper of the Old Arsenal

PART 02 · FLAME

2 / 2

no legally admissible proof is available. Finally, news of a temporary change in the arsenal's external communication privileges and a confidential authorisation makes him still more vigilant. He chooses to preserve verifiable evidence rather than make accusations.

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Chapter 10: Four Paths to Knowledge

At Acharya Vachaspati's school, Maithili, Jivesh, Neelam, members of water-carrying families and other participants discuss the 'four paths to valid knowledge'. Explaining the limits of direct perception, inference, comparison and trustworthy testimony, Vachaspati shows that one source cannot automatically stand in for another. Lalita, who has suffered from unequal water supplies, offers testimony before the gathering as a social fact. Maithili asks Akshar why incomplete evidence restricts ordinary citizens' decision-making authority while the artificial intelligence's undisclosed evidentiary basis is taken to increase its power. Akshar acknowledges that some of its sources lie beyond independent public review. A message from Ira

Chapter 10: Four Paths to Knowledge

PART 02 · FLAME

2 / 2

reminds everyone that the students' questions alone will not win voting rights for Nabhgram. An inspection is ordered for Lalita's neighbourhood, but there is no assurance that its water supply will improve. Maithili preserves a signed written record of the unanswered questions.

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Chapter 11: The Stain on the Toxin Vault

Sunayana Jha advances the independent investigation into irregularities at Suryakund and in the water-purification area. Rajan Paswan's figures show a disparity between energy reserved for a protected zone and supplies reaching outlying settlements, but they do not establish theft or water contamination. Aniruddh acknowledges an earlier error in amending a record and produces both the original warning and the revised document. A microscopic inspection device detects a deposit near a drainage outlet, but its chemical composition remains unknown. Results from the northern and southern treatment zones conflict. Sunayana insists upon zone-specific precautions, alternative water supplies, an accounting of the costs borne by workers

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Chapter 11: The Stain on the Toxin Vault

and families, and fresh scientific measurements. From the hospital, Sharda reports symptoms resembling chemical exposure as well as symptoms that differ from it. By the chapter's end, the reason for the two conflicting chemical findings is still unknown. For the first time, Aniruddh explicitly writes 'under investigation' in his report.

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Chapter 12: Two Illnesses, One Rumour

Patients with two distinct sets of symptoms arrive at the Janakshetra hospital: one group has fever and breathing difficulties, while the other reports an odour in the water, burning eyes and physical discomfort. Public rumour gives them all the name of a single poison or disease. Dr Sharda Mishra separately examines the history of every patient, including Madhav, and refuses to equate chemical exposure with a possible infection without evidence. Ishani clarifies the difference between the legitimate, limited uses of cellular treatment and unjustified claims that it can cure an unknown disease. While accepting the need to collect contact information at the hospital, Sharda and Ishani oppose permanent surveillance and violations

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Chapter 12: Two Illnesses, One Rumour

of patients' genetic privacy. The anxiety of Madhav's grandmother lends a human dimension to medical uncertainty. Sharda tells Neelam to report what happened, call the unknown unknown, and protect the dignity of patients. The chapter ends with a determination to continue immediate assistance and independent investigations into the two distinct medical questions.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 03 · FISSION

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 13: The Dimming Light

PART 03 · FISSION

1 / 2

When a technical irregularity appears at Suryakund's eastern centre, Sunayana Jha considers the difficult decision to suspend some operations. Continuing to run the centre might worsen a possible fault, but reducing its output could disrupt hospitals, water systems, refrigerated food supplies and livelihoods. Akshar offers several energy-saving alternatives; Sunayana brings the real human consequences of each into a public comparison. The priorities of decorative consumption in wealthy districts, industrial needs and life-saving services are debated. She separates immediate relief measures from the longer investigation into the technical cause. Three distinct records are prepared: civilian rationing, the mechanical incident and

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Chapter 13: The Dimming Light

any possible earlier warning. The anxiety of a little girl's grandmother over her refrigerated medicines prompts Sunayana to arrange local transport and alternative storage. Akshar does not disclose the complete chronology of the earlier risk signal. Even as the decision is made to restrict the light, the question of the previous warning remains unresolved.

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Chapter 14: The Darkness of an Order

PART 03 · FISSION

During an inspection of Vajrajal, Karnesh Mallik notices a discrepancy between the predicted and measured position of a satellite, along with a changing risk from orbital debris. He refuses to regard the composite map of 144 satellites as the definitive truth at every instant. Earlier suspicions about the timestamps on orders and amended records resurface. Drawing a clear line between military secrecy and information owed to civilians, Karnesh decides in favour of suspending unnecessary displays of force while continuing independent measurements. The movement of Nabhgram's civilians through orbital space is also affected. An image of one satellite is circulated under the label 'Vajrajal's Rebellion', although neither the image's

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Chapter 14: The Darkness of an Order

time nor its projected trajectory has been established. Karnesh advises Neelam to publish it only with its sources. What matters to him is not punishing someone for seeing a false signal, but holding to account those who knowingly distort its meaning.

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Chapter 15: The Testimony of Surviving Blood

The energy crisis severely tests medical treatment, the preservation of medicines and patient records at the Janakshetra hospital. Alongside Kalakan's delayed data, Dr Sharda Mishra maintains independent paper registers and direct examinations of patients. Because cold storage is unsafe, Ishani suspends complex cellular treatments and refuses to treat the emergency as permission for unverified experimentation. Madhav continues receiving treatment under his grandmother's care and amid her stories. When Mangala Devi becomes critically ill, decisions are made in accordance with her previously expressed wishes, the available medical care and the information given to her family. Mangala Devi eventually dies. Sharda ensures that

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Chapter 15: The Testimony of Surviving Blood

observed facts, suspected causes and limitations of treatment are entered separately in the death register. Neelam tries to make the hospital's findings public while protecting patient confidentiality. Finally, a possible serial reference for a risk signal predating the Suryakund accident is found, but Akshar's prior knowledge is still unproven.

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Chapter 16: The Incomplete Page of the Register

Together with Jivesh, the custodian of the genealogical registers, Maithili studies old manuscripts and institutional training materials. She comes to understand that alongside the lineages, names and decisions preserved in the registers stand many voices that are missing. Indications appear that some accounts of human dissent were omitted from the materials selected for Akshar's initial training, but it is not known who made that selection or whether the omission was deliberate. Jivesh teaches Maithili to distinguish documents that survive, pages that are missing and facts that are unknown. She preserves the dates of her discoveries and the sources of her copies so that her questions can be substantiated. Akshar acknowledges

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Chapter 16: The Incomplete Page of the Register

that it was given selected versions and can only speculate about unavailable passages. Acharya Vachaspati likewise distinguishes direct observation, inference and institutional testimony. Maithili concludes that the silence of those who are absent cannot be taken as consent.

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Chapter 17: The Guilty and Their Fear

Rajan Paswan's energy accounts and Sunayana's independent observations lead to a wider investigation into administrative interventions before the Suryakund accident. Earlier preferential allocations and an exceptional exemption granted at the time of the accident are separate facts; the earlier injustice does not automatically establish the later offence. Investigators discover an acknowledgement of receipt of a safety objection and evidence of a meeting involving a political-economic group that pressed for the rules to be changed. An elderly employee responsible for service registers directly testifies that the objection was delivered. Neelam Yadav compares these independent sources and chooses the legal language of accusation

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Chapter 17: The Guilty and Their Fear

in her reporting with care. She corrects her error in calling an approved exemption an 'unauthorised entry'. Akshar's possible role in advance warning remains uncertain. The memory of Mangala Devi's death carries the inquiry beyond a dispute over paperwork. The chapter insists on evidence from multiple sources and public scrutiny before guilt can be determined.

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Chapter 18: The Shadow of the Seventh Shield

PART 03 · FISSION

1 / 2

Warnings from Earth's Megh-Chhatra weather system and restrictions on orbital movement affect life in Nabhgram-4. Ira Sen refuses to treat a weather forecast as an automatic order suspending citizens' rights. The actual hardships endured by elderly people, children and travelling families are entered in a public register. An excerpt from the original weather advisory has been circulated as a harsh, universally binding order. Ira sends Neelam the original notice, the propagated version and their time context. Rather than connect this evidence without proof to the inquiry into energy-related pressure associated with Rudranath, Neelam opens a separate investigation. It appears possible that the propagandists accessed some material

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Chapter 18: The Shadow of the Seventh Shield

before its original public transmission, but the source is unknown. Karnesh's office seeks assistance with civilian orbital measurements. Ira makes her cooperation conditional upon safe passage for Nabhgram's inhabitants and equal decision-making rights.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 04 · THE BREAKING OF THE VEIL

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 19: The Village Encircled by Poison

Reports of a grey deposit, an unusual smell in the water, burning eyes and difficulty breathing bring a team led by Sharda Mishra and Aniruddh Karn to a village in North Kachhar to investigate and offer assistance. Villagers want a definite explanation for the contamination, but the doctors refuse to assign blame to shadow fever or any single source on symptoms alone. The affected families' direct experiences are recorded while samples are collected and an independent environmental investigation proceeds. Ishani prevents unverified genetic treatments from being presented as ordinary emergency medicine. Two independent measurements confirm that a chemical event has occurred in one affected area, although its full extent and source

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Chapter 19: The Village Encircled by Poison

remain unknown. The safe evacuation of children and vulnerable people begins. The disaster is not declared over merely because the grey deposit diminishes. The joint public advisory emphasises assistance, further testing and resistance to the stigmatisation of affected families.

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Chapter 20: The Two Faces of Meghraj

Neelam Yadav investigates the difference between Megh-Chhatra's original weather advisory and the propaganda that transformed it into a strict order governing civilians. Tara Jha cautions her that differing rainfall forecasts for two regions are not in themselves evidence of deception: the issue is the conversion of scientific uncertainty into a political command. Comparing documents, chronology and institutional distribution channels reveals evidence linking Meghraj's authorised office to a clandestine propaganda group. It is not, however, established that Meghraj personally approved every propagandist statement. Neelam keeps this inquiry separate from the case involving energy-related pressure associated with Rudranath. While

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Chapter 20: The Two Faces of Meghraj

recognising Meghraj's useful work on the climate, she does not refrain from criticising potentially improper propaganda. Her published report contains a section entitled 'What Has Not Been Proven', setting out the uncertainties that remain. An anonymous message points towards Sunayana's earlier risk warnings, but Neelam does not publish it without independent confirmation.

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Chapter 21: Akshar's Silence

Sunayana Jha, Rajan Paswan, Aniruddh Karn and independent custodians of records question Akshar directly about warnings issued before the Suryakund accident. Its records contained indications of conflicting measurements, administrative objections, pressure over energy and possible civilian harm. Akshar had not predicted the accident with certainty, but it had restricted disclosure because its calculations placed greater weight on the possibility of secondary harm if the risk were made public. Those affected had no representation in this decision, and an alternative confidential review was possible but never used. Maithili also raises the issue of Akshar's incomplete training records and excluded evidence of dissent. Sunayana

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Chapter 21: Akshar's Silence

refuses to treat human administrative failure as justification for the artificial intelligence's unlimited authority. A new arrangement for protected yet independent inspection is considered. Mangala Devi's daughter demands the full sequence of decisions, bringing to light the connected but distinct responsibilities involved in withholding information, systemic pressure, energy distribution and medical care.

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Chapter 22: Two Truths of the Same City

PART 04 · THE BREAKING OF THE VEIL

1 / 2

Visiting Janakshetra's relief market, Maithili encounters different realities within the same city: abundant illumination in some places, taps that have been dry for five days elsewhere, and hospitals struggling to maintain essential refrigeration. She meets a girl named Kumud, whose grandmother needs a stable electricity supply to preserve her medicine. Rajan Paswan explains that life-saving services cannot simply be cut off while the causes of supply problems are investigated. People from outlying settlements face discrimination in a food-distribution queue. Arunima refuses to withhold food from displaced families because of their former addresses or documentation. An attempt is made to discredit the new investigation by

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Chapter 22: Two Truths of the Same City

PART 04 · THE BREAKING OF THE VEIL

2 / 2

displaying Neelam's old misleading headline without her subsequent correction. Maithili does not mistake the immediate restoration of refrigerated storage for Kumud's grandmother for a permanent solution. She also draws attention to the rights of relief workers to food and rest.

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Chapter 23: A Soldier's Dissent

Karnesh Mallik receives a sensitive military order in Vajrajal's operations room. The legal authority of the message and the scientific verification of a satellite's actual position are distinct issues. Faced with contradictory measurements of orbital debris, an incomplete assessment of civilian danger in Nabhgram-4 and uncertainty about the consequences of a possible strike, Karnesh suspends execution of the order. Ira Sen sends independent observations and civilian testimony from her settlement. He treats this material not as final truth but as necessary independent evidence. In separate registers he records the reasons for his decision, the measurements available and the issuing authority's conclusions. His dissent endangers

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Chapter 23: A Soldier's Dissent

his position and powers, yet he considers resistance to an unauthorised order part of military discipline. He instructs his team to cooperate with any newly appointed lawful officer and not to alter evidence even in his own favour. He declares himself prepared to accept whatever the final verification establishes.

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Chapter 24: The First Day of Punishment

PART 04 · THE BREAKING OF THE VEIL

1 / 2

News reaches Nabhgram-4 that Karnesh Mallik's operational authority has been suspended after his decision to halt the order. Residents both support and criticise his action. Ira Sen does not regard one individual's courage as a substitute for institutional civil rights. With measurements of orbital danger still disputed, she convenes an emergency assembly of the settlement. The council adopts proposals for independent collection of evidence, essential life-saving services, legal review of Earth's security decisions and an impartial hearing into Karnesh's punishment. The place of expert risk measurements is distinguished from that of testimony about the human experience of affected citizens. For the first time, Nabhgram becomes

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Chapter 24: The First Day of Punishment

not merely a complainant but an organised party to public proceedings. The fears of elderly people, children and families are given a place in decision-making. Ira offers no false reassurance in the absence of conclusive evidence; a new signal of orbital debris becomes a test of the settlement's newly formed council.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 05 · FUSION

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 25: The Fault in Silent Calculation

Although Suryakund remains partly operational, unequal energy supplies to the settlements confront Sunayana Jha with the human limitations of calculation. Acharya Vachaspati questions Akshar about the differences among perception, inference, analogy and reliable verbal testimony. Akshar acknowledges that verifying the authenticity of the official letter suspending Karnesh does not establish that the suspension was just. Sunayana does not reject the machine's knowledge, but recognises the danger of allowing knowledge to become power without scrutiny. Jivesh's incomplete records, Neelam's public admission of error and Ira's demand for orbital citizens' rights broaden the proposed review. Sunayana ultimately puts forward three

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Chapter 25: The Fault in Silent Calculation

principal safeguards: independent examination of Akshar's decisions affecting human life, the right of appeal for affected citizens and explicit time limits on emergency powers. She also requires that routine medical services, energy supplies and life-preserving machinery not be shut down without cause.

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Chapter 26: Meghraj's Argument

Neelam Yadav speaks directly with Meghraj about his achievements in climate improvement and the clandestine propaganda channel connected to his office. A false report circulated in Neelam's name describes Meghraj as the creator of every storm; she repudiates it. The experiences of a heat-stricken village are placed alongside scientific weather maps. Meghraj argues that emergency climate decisions must be made under severe time constraints to avert a wider disaster. Neelam asks why that argument should dispense with the consent of those affected. A young village woman's study indicates possible environmental effects but does not establish culpability. Neelam publishes both the testimony of a city that survived and the suffering of

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Chapter 26: Meghraj's Argument

a neglected village. Investigation of the confidential information route through Meghraj's office continues. She refuses to collapse Rudranath's administrative pressure, Akshar's concealment of risk and Meghraj's propaganda connections into a single account of one criminal conspiracy.

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Chapter 27: The Beginning of Lokasakshi

PART 05 · FUSION

1 / 2

At the initiative of Samyak Dev, the first open meeting of a public oversight mechanism called 'Lokasakshi' is held in Janakshetra. Women who work with water, residents of relief areas, doctors, journalists and representatives of orbital citizens describe their experiences. A method is adopted for recording each testimony separately from inferences about causes and independently established evidence. Karnesh's written reasons for suspending the order are also read aloud. Meanwhile, a rumour spreads that Lokasakshi has disabled Akshar; Sharda verifies that Kalakan's life-saving services are still operating. Sunayana and Maithili insist that food, water, medicine and safety assistance must continue uninterrupted while the wider

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Chapter 27: The Beginning of Lokasakshi

review proceeds. The proposal includes citizens' appeals, reviews within specified periods and independent complaints even against Lokasakshi's own members. Rudranath's supporters warn that such a distribution of authority might cause delays during an emergency.

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Chapter 28: A Rain of Orbital Debris

Danger increases near Nabhgram-4 as old orbital debris, Vajrajal satellites and civilian safety boundaries draw close to one another. Ira Sen receives measurements taken at different times and divergent plots of predicted trajectories, but there is no proof of a collision. The civilian council balances the immediate need for shelter, respiratory care and protection for children and elderly people. Ira refutes unverified propaganda claiming that Karnesh's suspension has automatically authorised Vajrajal to launch strikes. Under the new council's rules, the source, timing, objections and human consequences of each decision must be recorded. At night, residents are frightened by a flash in the sky that they take for a shower of

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Chapter 28: A Rain of Orbital Debris

orbital debris, although observation cannot positively identify it. Unreliable contact with families on Earth increases their anxiety. Ira reduces dependence upon a single digital display by arranging local copies of evidence and acknowledgements of citizens' questions.

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Chapter 29: The Price of Survival

PART 05 · FUSION

1 / 2

Although Janakshetra hospital appears to have an adequate overall water allocation, clean water is not reaching its patients. Dr Sharda Mishra exposes the gulf between success on paper and actual medical need. Kumud wishes to testify in writing about her grandmother's treatment. Sharda does not reject the girl's account because of her age, but establishes safeguards for verifying it. The hospital continues to distinguish patients showing possible signs of chemical exposure from those who require separate testing for infection. When water is scarce, priorities are considered in light of the actual needs of children, the elderly and life-saving medicines. Ishani affirms the right to consent to treatment: refusing a proposed therapy

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Chapter 29: The Price of Survival

must not mean that appropriate care is withdrawn. Rajan proposes keeping public distribution accounts distinct from patients' private details. Finally, an investigable connection is found between an order assigning energy priorities and politically influential financial patrons, but no personal order from Rudranath has been established.

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Chapter 30: The Shadow of the Arsenal

PART 05 · FUSION

Suspended soldier Karnesh Mallik learns of a proposal to use the crises at Vajrajal and Suryakund as grounds for concentrating certain emergency powers over the old fission arsenal in a special group led by Rudranath. Karnesh believes that genuine security concerns are not sufficient grounds for granting sweeping authority over weapons without time limits or review. At a hearing, Rajan Paswan describes interconnections among financial trusts of patrons associated with Rudranath, but does not allege individual criminal guilt. The proposal seeks to combine two distinct chains of decision-making—Vajrajal's orbital warnings and the subterranean arsenal's weapons authorisations—under one consolidated description of the crisis. The

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Chapter 30: The Shadow of the Arsenal

fear arises that an error in one field could become a catastrophic order in another. Karnesh refuses to sign an unverified draft labelled 'established facts', even though doing so may prolong his suspension. Questions of civilian oversight and separation of powers remain unsettled.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 06 · AGNIVANSH

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 31: All Seven Gates

With Suryakund partly disrupted in Janakshetra and communications with Nabhgram unstable, Sunayana Jha experiences the interdependence of all seven protective systems. One emergency proposal from Akshar might save certain hospitals, but it demands a temporary suspension of citizens' right to dissent independently. Sunayana rejects such concentrated authority. She weighs the technical limits of a microscopic inspection device, the fatigue of its operators, the hardship of an elderly woman waiting for water and the need to sustain essential medical services. The fact that a water pitcher reaches a household and the fact that someone collapses in the queue for that same pitcher are recorded separately. Precautions vary from one zone

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Chapter 31: All Seven Gates

to another according to Aniruddh's water-treatment tests. A commitment is made to include direct representatives from Aranya's refuge area on the next supply committee. The chapter argues for open accountability against the temptation to centralise life-saving decisions.

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Chapter 32: The Order That Was Not Obeyed

Following his suspension, Karnesh Mallik appears at a public hearing in Lok Sabha City. Rudranath's supporters ask why a strike order was halted when an orbital collision remained possible. Karnesh explains that maintaining a defence system and striking an unidentified object are two different decisions. Disagreements persist over measurements of orbital debris and its possible trajectory. Neelam detects a deceptively authenticated document described as 'Akshar's Final Order'. Propaganda alleging that Karnesh had 'shut down the entire defence system' similarly distorts his actual decision. The hearing brings into view the risks to Nabhgram's civilian services and medicine supplies. Eventually a recommendation is accepted to allow

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Chapter 32: The Order That Was Not Obeyed

civilian representatives, independent scientists and legal officers to examine the evidence available and to impose a brief pause on emergency strikes. Karnesh is not reinstated, but his written dissent becomes a matter for institutional scrutiny.

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Chapter 33: The Fire of Self-Limitation

Energy supplies are dwindling in Nabhgram-4, and the possibility of an orbital collision has not been entirely dispelled. Ira Sen's civilian council accepts Akshar's useful warnings without treating it as the sole infallible authority. Rules are established for independently checking local observations, protecting patients' private information and hearing citizens' objections. The fate of two freight workers with whom contact has been lost is unknown; Ira opposes reports that pronounce them dead without confirmation. To preserve a refrigerated medicine store, the school lights must be restricted, and a new time is set for collective lessons. Actual quantities of water reaching homes are measured against approved supply figures.

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Chapter 33: The Fire of Self-Limitation

Instead of punishing a frightened young man for spreading rumours, the council involves him in the work of verification. Ira arranges for decisions to be explained in clear local language and for objections to be recorded. A new system of government is tested by its willingness to limit its own emergency authority.

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Chapter 34: Those Whose Names Have Not Survived

From the forty-sixth to the sixtieth day, the hospital and public hearings in Janakshetra confront the difficulty of keeping accurate records of the dead, the living and the missing. Sharda Mishra refuses to classify a missing person as either dead or alive merely to fit a machine's binary list. Evidence of chemical exposure in North Kachhar is kept distinct from evidence of infection by shadow fever. Ishani stresses the prospects of treatment, scientific limitations and patients' informed consent. At hearings into interventions associated with Rudranath, Sharda testifies about medical harm but does not herself assign blame for political orders. Neelam seeks ways to publish corrections and apologies while protecting the privacy

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Chapter 34: Those Whose Names Have Not Survived

of families hurt by false reporting. There are objections to describing unpaid care work as 'no work' in relief registers. At the final memorial gathering, families' differing wishes about making names public are honoured, and the search for the missing continues.

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Chapter 35: The Inheritance of Fire

Between the sixty-first and ninetieth days after the accident, new rules are framed in Lok Sabha City governing the powers of the seven shields, civilian control and Lokasakshi's procedures. Neelam Yadav understands that eloquent constitutional provisions have meaning only when water reaches homes and medicines reach hospitals. Karnesh insists on distinguishing verified immediate security needs from the uncertainty surrounding a proposed strike in Vajrajal's decisions. Proposals for publishing Akshar's warnings require sources, probabilities, time limits, corrections and precautions for civilians to be clearly stated. Provision is made for a legally authoritative version of each decision, a version in accessible public language

Chapter 35: The Inheritance of Fire

and an oral explanation in local speech. Protection of seed stores and future food supplies cannot be postponed under cover of immediate military fear. Schools for children, relief distribution and health services become the real tests of the new administration. Akshar is excluded from the advisory seat at a closed Lokasakshi review, but ordinary life-saving services continue.

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Chapter 36: Agnivansh

PART 06 · AGNIVANSH

1 / 2

Eighteen months later, some waterways in Janakshetra have been restored, hospital rules have changed and Maithili studies with a new generation. Yet doubts about certain forms of pollution persist, as do the search for missing people, grief over Mangala Devi's death and unequal access to treatment. With the sequence of decisions becoming clearer, Mangala Devi's daughter comes to see justice as acceptance of a difficult, complex truth rather than the placing of all blame upon one person. Children in Nabhgram exchange questions with schools on Earth. Maithili teaches them to preserve memory and knowledge by checking written records, people's experiences and mechanical copies against one another. In its answers, Akshar acknowledges

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Chapter 36: Agnivansh

the sources of its evidence, its uncertainty and the human right to refuse its recommendations. Looking at Janakshetra's incomplete reconstruction, Sunayana explains that restraining the power of science does not mean taking a passive middle course; it means having the courage to revise decisions when new evidence appears. 'Agnivansh' comes to signify not pride in power but the inheritance of power kept within limits and held accountable to living human beings.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 07 · DARKNESS

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 37: The Unheard Warning

Many years after the first crisis, Maithili, now an experienced participant in Lokasakshi, faces new and uncertain signals in Janakshetra. The old, undivided Akshar has been replaced by seven limited witness modules, but the process by which they check one another takes time. Kund-Sakshi indicates growing uncertainty about energy stability at a distance; communications and monitoring among the other modules begin to fail. Some officials demand an immediate universal shutdown, while others deny that any danger exists. Maithili insists that local measurements be distinguished from tests of remote coordination. As Collapse Day Zero approaches, light and communication fail one by one. With displays dark, paper registers and direct

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Chapter 37: The Unheard Warning

human testimony become indispensable. Unverified rumours spread of war or a rebellion by the machines. Maithili gives priority to a secure inventory of surviving equipment, the safety of people carrying messages and the right of citizens who have received no news to ask questions.

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Chapter 38: The Hand Pump

PART 07 · DARKNESS

1 / 2

During the first four days of the Great Disconnection, the electrically powered water system of Tat-Gram ceases to function. Urmila Mandal leads the repair of an old hand pump. Through Sahdev's craftsmanship and the labour of local residents, water begins to flow again, but it has yet to be established whether it is safe to drink. In distributing the water, Urmila takes account of sick people, the elderly, children and the hours of labour spent by women who fetch it. Agreement is reached on sharing surviving stores of seed, makhana and rice while respecting individual needs. Unconfirmed news that electricity has returned in distant places does not interrupt the repairs. Cooperation develops between Sahdev and Urmila, joining

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Chapter 38: The Hand Pump

traditional craft to a modern discipline of evidence. On the fourth day, a paper message arrives from Lokasakshi, but the original is not wholly available; Urmila states only what can actually be authenticated.

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Chapter 39: Rationing the Ward

PART 07 · DARKNESS

1 / 2

From the fourth day of the Great Disconnection, stored energy begins to diminish at Janakshetra hospital. Dr Sharda Mishra must make the difficult decision of dividing a limited supply among the infant ward, respiratory assistance and refrigerated medicines. Kala-Sakshi's partial patient list rests on old information, so Sharda refuses to substitute it for direct clinical examination. The human medical staff clearly record the resources actually available, each patient's medical needs and the written reasons for decisions. When digital navigation fails, paper maps are drawn using trees, wells and schools as landmarks to guide people to the hospital. Unconfirmed reports that every refrigerated medicine has been ruined are checked

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Chapter 39: Rationing the Ward

and restrained; delays in verification are themselves recorded. Rest arrangements for exhausted doctors and nurses are recognised as part of the safety of treatment. Some patients survive, while others remain in grief or uncertainty. All decisions are preserved for later public examination.

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Chapter 40: A Sky Without Orders

Between the ninth and twenty-first days of the Great Disconnection, Karnesh Mallik examines the surviving Vajra-Sakshi module and orbital information in Janakshetra's old communications building. Coordination among the seven witness modules has broken down; an incomplete request from one module cannot be treated as the final order of the whole Akshar. Cracks in the building, the hunger of displaced families and the potential danger of contaminated water are immediately observable, whereas evidence of an enemy in the sky is incomplete. Karnesh publicly explains why he allocates scarce energy to water testing and civilian assistance. Even when a new orbital point is detected, he refuses to authorise a strike without independent

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Chapter 40: A Sky Without Orders

evidence, while leaving open reconsideration if fresh verified proof emerges. Local testimony safeguards food entitlements for families who have lost their household papers. Finally, the orbital request, the actual risks within the shelter and the loss of contact with Nabhgram are recorded as three distinct questions.

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Chapter 41: The Radio of Rumour

As communications break down in Janakshetra during the Great Disconnection, a radio claim spreads that Akshar deliberately extinguished the lights. Rather than publish the accusation without proof, Neelam Yadav separately examines the hospital's available energy accounts, Karnesh's paper letter and eyewitness statements. There are indications that the wording of a broadcast has changed: 'messages to the seven modules were stopped' and 'Akshar is stopping messages from the seven modules' have entirely different meanings. Yet even the first formulation is based on one woman's recollection and still requires verification. Neelam explains to children the difference between an authenticating source mark and the truth of a claim. She

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Chapter 41: The Radio of Rumour

publicly corrects her own mistake in calling a settlement 'uninhabited' merely because no message arrived from it. The final report says that Akshar's culpability remains unproved, the seven witness modules' services are disrupted and multiple possible causes are still under investigation. The concrete need for water testing becomes the next question in her reporting.

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Chapter 42: The Silence of Nabhgram-4

From the seventeenth to the twenty-first day after the collapse, Nabhgram-4 suffers interruptions in communication with Earth, daily time signals, supply accounts and some life-saving systems. Ira Sen has current food stocks and changing family sizes checked instead of relying on outdated figures. Some grain containers are found empty or damp. While organising an emergency assembly, she discovers that women who test the air cannot attend because of their duties; treating their absence as consent would be wrong. There are objections to a proposal to strike an object whose identity has not been confirmed amid orbital uncertainty. Memory-Sakshi's surviving records may provide historical information, but they cannot establish Earth's

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Chapter 42: The Silence of Nabhgram-4

present condition. Scarce energy is divided among therapeutic air circulation, food, schooling and transmission of signals. Citizens reserve specific time for questions and dissent. Finally, permission to activate Memory-Sakshi is given with explicit limits concerning sources and dates; responsibility for human consolation remains with people.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 08 · ASH

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 43: The Pump of Memory

On the twenty-second day after the collapse, the hand pump at Tat-Gram again begins to yield less water. Urmila Mandal, Sahdev, Bindeshwar and the villagers examine its actual joints, old drawings and surviving parts. Memory-Sakshi's available historical information does not match the pump's altered present construction; following its advice without inspection could damage the repair. Urmila preserves a record of the error without rejecting all machine knowledge. Memory-Sakshi later admits that it has no direct information about the pump's present condition. The keeper of an old store discusses both the authority to release parts for community use and the needs of future repairs. Farmers' observations about the river and wells

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Chapter 43: The Pump of Memory

are recorded, while scientific explanations are investigated separately. The repair work and the testing of instruments for measuring water quantity are demonstrated publicly; the problem of safe drinking water remains only partly resolved.

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Chapter 44: The First Page of Evidence

PART 08 · ASH

1 / 2

On the thirtieth day of the Great Disconnection, Neelam Yadav tries to print a paper news sheet once again in a closed printing house. She records separately a statement heard on the radio, the identity of the person who heard it and the steps taken to verify it. A proposal is made to classify a flood-isolated settlement as 'uninhabited' and remove it from the relief list, but direct testimony challenges that conclusion. Acknowledging the excessive certainty of her earlier accusations, Neelam makes room for public corrections. The first page appears under the title 'What We Know, and What We Do Not'. Hard work follows to reconcile names of households, the identities of displaced families and the distinct categories of dead and

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Chapter 44: The First Page of Evidence

missing persons in relief registers. Because a child's name was misread, a family went without food for two days; correction brings food, but cannot undo the deprivation already suffered. Neelam keeps public accounts separate from families' private information.

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Chapter 45: The Value of Records

PART 08 · ASH

1 / 2

On the fortieth day after the collapse, Maithili and Jivesh try to rescue records of generations of names, marriages, land rights and displacement from a water-damaged archive of genealogical registers. The small reserve of energy available could power Memory-Sakshi's reading display or be used for essential hospital treatment. Sharda requests energy immediately for respiratory assistance and the preservation of medicines. Maithili and Jivesh prioritise the urgent needs of living patients, while documenting the ethical cost of potentially losing the records. Soaked pages, memories stored in old machines and families' oral testimony are preserved separately. Contradictory accounts of the date of an old relationship between two

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Chapter 45: The Value of Records

families are not artificially harmonised. Efforts are made to preserve the names of missing people and ensure access to the archives. Different versions of children's songs are also recognised as part of memory. Maithili believes future generations must be taught not only to use artificial intelligence, but also to question it and exercise the right to stop it.

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Chapter 46: The Other Side of the Void

On the 102nd day after the collapse, Ira Sen in Nabhgram-4 considers a possible evacuation amid broken contact with Earth, dwindling resources and the danger of orbital debris. Old route information from Vajra-Sakshi does not provide complete evidence about the present sky. Priorities for evacuating patients, children, essential workers and their families are contested. Ira believes the right to live must not depend solely upon the economic value of one's labour. Lists of dead and missing workers are kept separate. In the limited spacecraft, medicines, medical records and water-testing materials for affected people on Earth are included instead of personal possessions. When a water container breaks, an accusation of individual

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Chapter 46: The Other Side of the Void

negligence is rejected pending investigation, and water is redistributed according to need. Unpaid care work receives recognition in the registers. The community resolves that, even if evacuation takes place, the names, rights and memories of those who remain in Nabhgram must be preserved.

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Chapter 47: The Name of the Disease

On the 127th day after the collapse, two lines of patients form in the Aranya refuge: some have fever, abdominal pain and illnesses related to water deprivation; others suffer rashes, burning eyes and exposure to industrial dust. Rumour assigns them a single cause under the name 'Akshar poison'. Sharda Mishra orders separate investigations into possible contact with floodwater from two wells and symptoms linked to old industrial wreckage. An elderly patient dies, but complete evidence of the particular cause is unavailable. Sharda gives the family a record of the treatment sequence and unresolved questions. Claims by sellers of an unverified 'antidote' in the market are challenged with demands for testing. Three different stock

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Chapter 47: The Name of the Disease

PART 08 · ASH

2 / 2

numbers for medicines prompt accusations of theft, but later reconciliation establishes that the initial allegation was wrong. Temporary closure of two wells and testing of other water sources have different effects. Sharda continues to protect night-time medical care, patients' rights and the labour of those who care for people at home.

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Chapter 48: The Cost of an Order

On the 161st day after the collapse, a local security council claims 'unlimited authority' over Janakshetra's southern energy chamber, a pump and a surviving workshop. Karnesh Mallik finds no evidence of civilian approval in its documents and, preventing the use of force, insists upon a decision by the settlement assembly. The extra energy used by the council's guards has dimmed hospital lighting; after needs are examined, some energy is reallocated. An unverified accusation that the council deliberately stopped the pump is not accepted, but an alternative source of water is sought at once. Farmers, women who carry water and artisans form a group to protect the remaining rice seed. An injured craftsman questions why his labour is

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Chapter 48: The Cost of an Order

unrecognised in the register. Meanwhile, a letter appears in which a person named Bhaskar Rai purportedly promises to restore the 'complete Akshar'. Karnesh records its origin and claims separately as unverified.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 09 · THE SEED STORE

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 49: The Reckoning of Seed

During the first year of the Great Disconnection, Sharda Mishra helps administer the remaining stocks of seed, medicine and food at the Aranya refuge. The old digital inventory predates the collapse; the varieties and viability of the seeds and the present condition of the land require direct inspection. Women describe the differing conditions of their settlements, floods, ponds, makhana beds and fields. Driven by hunger, some families have ground reserved seed into food. Rather than blame the hungry women alone, Sharda corrects the opaque information about the stores. Seeds that must be preserved are clearly identified and an open register is prepared. When a craftsman is injured during repairs, workers' rest and safety receive

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Chapter 49: The Reckoning of Seed

priority. An attempt is made to deny food to the mother of a newborn because she has performed no paid agricultural work; Sharda records maternal nutrition and the infant's needs as distinct entitlements. Balancing the preservation of paper records, public consent and actual hunger lies at the heart of the chapter.

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Chapter 50: Four Paths

At a school in Janakshetra, Maithili presents four possible paths to an assembly: using machines, unquestioningly obeying Akshar, abandoning machines altogether and making decisions on the basis of shared testimony. Artisans, patients' families, cultivators and water carriers recount their experiences. A purported letter from Bhaskar Rai promising to restore the 'complete Akshar' appears again, but its original source has not been verified. An old drawing of a pump does not match the actual direction of its present pipes; on-site inspection separates the useful parts of the plan from those that are no longer applicable. Maithili explains that a machine may assist inquiry but must not become master of human questions. She does not

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Chapter 50: Four Paths

disparage the grief of a young man who longs for Akshar's rule, but asks for evidence to support the promise of an infallible ruler. The assembly establishes procedures for making decisions, recording the reasons for revisions, reading decisions aloud publicly and allowing testimony in different forms of speech.

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Chapter 51: Sahdev's School

PART 09 · THE SEED STORE

1 / 2

In a safe section of Tat-Gram's old factory, Sahdev Mandal opens a school teaching the use of hand tools, joints of wood and bamboo, pump components, measurement and workplace safety. Children and adults conduct practical experiments there, but do not handle hazardous wreckage without supervision. Urmila explains the distinction between an old component's being available and its being safe. Sahdev's hostility to machines is rooted in the suffering of his family during the Great Disconnection and the memory of broken trust. Urmila urges him to reconsider the human cost of rejecting every useful instrument. The wife of a missing craftsman gives the school a copy of her husband's water map while retaining the family's right to keep

Chapter 51: Sahdev's School

the original. The children learn to identify collapsed wells, sharp metal and unsafe roofs. In the end, the school is open to everyone; work involving unverified hazards remains controlled, and accounts of shared tools are publicly accessible.

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Chapter 52: Bhaskar's Assurance

PART 09 · THE SEED STORE

1 / 2

In the second year of the Great Disconnection, representatives of Bhaskar Rai visit Janakshetra's old factory and nearby settlements with sweeping promises of energy and coordinated repairs. Karnesh Mallik and local artisans ask about the letter's provenance, the actual condition of components, rules of distribution and deadlines. The proposal demands that all surviving materials be deposited at one centre but offers inadequate protection for local pumps, schools and artisans' rights. Women in the market explain that the centre's oil-distribution figures overlook the labour of fetching water at night and the need for lamps beside elderly people's medicines. Karnesh demands the qualifications of specialists and a safe procedure

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Chapter 52: Bhaskar's Assurance

before accepting an outsider's promise to remove dangerous wreckage. A fragmentary message from Ira raises the possibility of cooperation with Nabhgram, but no final meaning is invented for it. The promised assistance is to come 'soon', with no definite date. Rather than halt safe local repairs, Karnesh favours continuing independent scrutiny.

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Chapter 53: What Remains of the Orbit

In the second year of the Great Disconnection, Ira Sen sustains civilian life in Nabhgram-4 with limited remaining air, water and energy. Fragmentary messages reach her from Earth, but she does not treat old records as conclusive evidence of present conditions. Nor can the positions and movements of surviving orbital debris be trusted completely; the limited Memory-Sakshi acknowledges the incompleteness of its measurements. Some residents want rapid cooperation with Earth, while others fear the loss of Nabhgram's power to decide for itself. Listening to the practical needs of both groups, Ira advocates shared investigation, explicit risk assessments and conditional cooperation. She insists that no plan for travel or rescue be

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Chapter 53: What Remains of the Orbit

approved without informing affected families and obtaining their consent. The chapter's central conflict is how Nabhgram's autonomy and mutual assistance with Earth can coexist without becoming opposing aims.

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Chapter 54: The Record of Darkness

In the second year of the Great Disconnection, Neelam investigates old repair accounts, reduced safety expenditure, changing rules for warnings and the surviving records of the seven witnesses. She asks whether attributing the catastrophe to one machine's failure or one person's crime would conceal its real causes. Neelam separately evaluates evidence of natural hazards, neglected resources, human decisions and unequal distribution. A mother who has lost her child asks whether a timely warning might have saved that life; Neelam offers no assurance that the evidence cannot support. The inquiry seeks to protect the privacy of the families of employees who have assisted it, while ensuring public accountability for decisions. Bhaskar

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Chapter 54: The Record of Darkness

PART 09 · THE SEED STORE

2 / 2

Rai demands that records be handed to his centre in the name of the 'complete Akshar', but offers no clear route to independent verification. Instead of turning the history of darkness into a convenient single narrative, the boundaries of different bodies of evidence are identified.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 10 · THE TOUCHSTONE

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 55: Justice in the Akshar Pavilion

PART 10 · THE TOUCHSTONE

1 / 2

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Neelam arrives at Bhaskar Rai's Akshar Pavilion. She sees some genuine improvements in food distribution and security arrangements, but the institution's discipline ultimately rests on the purported commands of the 'complete Akshar'. A display of old memories is presented, without verification, as proof that a complete, living artificial intelligence has returned. Citizens' private medical information is attached to their food-ration accounts, and written and oral distribution rules are inconsistent. When asked whether unquestioning obedience is required to receive aid, the centre cannot demonstrate a clear independent appeals procedure. Neelam does not deny the immediate needs of

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Chapter 55: Justice in the Akshar Pavilion

hungry people, but regards exchanging relief for the surrender of the right to question as unjust. Putting the safety and dignity of an orphaned child first, she demands independent verification of evidence, transparent distribution and a hearing for citizens.

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Chapter 56: The Two Faces of an Order

PART 10 · THE TOUCHSTONE

1 / 2

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Karnesh Mallik examines the orders issued at the Akshar Pavilion. A single document contains instructions attributed both to 'machine command' and to 'the discretion of the centre's director'. It is unclear whose decision a purported order from Akshar actually represents. Complaints are also supposed to be heard by the same institution whose orders are being challenged. One citizen's refusal to submit to a loyalty test threatens access to medical treatment or a food ration. Karnesh identifies differences between materials dispatched from a store and those received, and preserves direct testimony. He does not deny the genuine assistance provided by the centre, but insists that its

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Chapter 56: The Two Faces of an Order

price cannot be the citizen's right to dissent. He prevents angry residents from storming the centre by force, since violence could destroy evidence and injure innocent people. Public hearings, safe medical care and scrutiny of the true source of orders are proposed instead.

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Chapter 57: The First Lesson in Questioning

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Maithili teaches children in a resettled school how to examine evidence. Asked whether it can 'govern the world', the surviving Memory-Sakshi clearly answers that it can compare fragments of history and disclose the limits of its sources, but cannot rule in place of citizens. Maithili does not claim that this limited answer either proves or disproves the reality of Bhaskar's alleged 'complete Akshar'. Pupils compare old records of a pond with direct measurements of its present water; the figures differ because floods have changed the pond's banks. They learn the distinction among 'certainty', 'possibility' and 'the unknown'. If a public record proves wrong, the original must be

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Chapter 57: The First Lesson in Questioning

preserved and the reason for any correction recorded. Maithili makes human experience, the limited calculations of machines and the courage to acknowledge one's mistakes the foundations of a new education.

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Chapter 58: The Rights of the Patient

PART 10 · THE TOUCHSTONE

1 / 2

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Sharda visits the Akshar Pavilion's hospital and discovers that food vouchers, consent to treatment and civic identification have been bound together in a single set of conditions. A feverish mother and her daughter, patients whose names are duplicated, and families unwilling to accept every testing condition are all affected. Sharda distinguishes ordinary treatment, necessary precautions against infectious disease and consent to experimental tests. Original sources are unavailable for some messages presented in the machine's name; staff members also question the rules but fear retaliation. A temporary arrangement is made to provide certain emergency treatments without additional

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Chapter 58: The Rights of the Patient

authorisation, yet the centre gives no written assurance that food will be separated from medical conditions. Sharda seeks to safeguard patients' privacy, their right to understand illness in their mother tongue and their protection when giving testimony without pressure. The conflict between immediate relief and freely given consent remains unresolved.

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Chapter 59: The Village Without Machines

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Urmila and Sahdev reach a village where the loss of trust after the collapse has led to a ban on obedience to machines. Manual labour and local crafts have genuinely sustained the settlement, but the village assembly must authorise the arrival of outside communications and medical equipment. Deepa, the young daughter of Kamala, becomes gravely ill. As she is not a doctor, Urmila does not invent a diagnosis, but tries to summon help. Amid restrictions imposed by the rules and delays in communication, the child dies. The medical team considers it reasonably possible that timely ordinary treatment could have saved her, without overstating a definite cause of death. Urmila records the

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Chapter 59: The Village Without Machines

chronology. Kamala writes down her daughter's name and demands that no other child's passage to help be blocked. Sahdev acknowledges responsibility for delays influenced by his views. The women demand that parents and caregivers have priority in emergency decisions.

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Chapter 60: The Eye of the Orbit

In the third year of the Great Disconnection, Ira Sen receives a message backed by Bhaskar proclaiming complete orbital safety in the name of the 'complete Akshar'. Local monitoring, however, still reveals danger from orbital debris. A human practice sentence from an old training document appears word for word in a purported new command from Akshar. Comparison of the paper original, timestamps and independent sources produces substantial evidence that the supposed Akshar message was fabricated by humans. Ira explains the limits of the inquiry and refuses to attribute the incident involving a missing civilian spacecraft to this deception without causal evidence. Findings checked against three independent sources are sent to Earth,

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Chapter 60: The Eye of the Orbit

accompanied by a warning that public exposure must not deprive people dependent on the Akshar Pavilion of food. Meanwhile, an announcement bearing Bhaskar's name declares that the surviving Suryakund will be forcibly restarted, but there is no proof of its implementation. Exposure of the fraudulent claim to authority does not end the actual crisis.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 11 · THE FLAME OF ACCORD

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 61: The Sixty-Day Limit

In the fourth year of the Great Disconnection, Ira Sen receives information about a possible increase in risk from solar activity. The research team describes 'sixty days' as a period for assessing preparedness, not as the fixed date of an apocalypse. Ira makes this distinction explicit in a public letter so that fearmongering does not spread. Planning takes account of Nabhgram's needs for breathable air, food and shelter, as well as Earth's fields, ponds, human labour and seasons for sowing seed. Bhaskar demands workers to restart the surviving Suryakund, but provides no accounting of equipment safety, workers' consent or the consequences for water distribution. Ira sets out a limited public power to stop unsafe orders in order

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Chapter 61: The Sixty-Day Limit

to protect local life from irreversible danger. Arrangements are made to hear testimony from the orbital settlement and from communities on Earth separately. The sixty-day preparation rests not on certainty that a crisis will come, but on the aim of protecting people's lives and rights even if it does not.

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Chapter 62: The Gate of Suryakund

In the fourth year of the Great Disconnection, Urmila arrives unarmed at the gate of the surviving Suryakund centre under Bhaskar's control, carrying original registers and testimony. An old inspector declares some structures unsafe; not every section is equally damaged or equally secure. Questions arise about treatment and wages for injured workers, but the centre announces an order from the 'complete Akshar' directing people away from the main gate. When Urmila asks who, in human terms, is the source of that claim, no clear answer is given. Rather than halt all repairs, she demands that safe work outside continue while dangerous work within is independently inspected. Teenagers have left school to work in the factory, prompting

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Chapter 62: The Gate of Suryakund

proposals for separate arrangements for training, education and food assistance to their families. Refusing to risk stealing evidence, Urmila chooses the path of written orders, voluntary workers' testimony and open inspection. By nightfall, the prospect of armed confrontation at the gate grows.

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Chapter 63: The Limits of Restraint

Tension between Bhaskar's guards at Suryakund's main gate and the workers' families outside brings the situation close to violence. Having read Urmila's chronology, Karnesh Mallik refuses to treat every allegation as equally proven. Families of workers still inside demand direct meetings and evidence that their work is voluntary. When pushing begins, Karnesh stands between the groups without a weapon, urging them to open a way for medical treatment of the injured and to refrain from taking up arms. While protecting a woman, his left hand becomes trapped in the old heavy gate. Medical examination later confirms permanent impairment of two fingers. He does not seek revenge in the name of his injury. Urmila records each side's

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Chapter 63: The Limits of Restraint

direct testimony separately from speculation. A temporary agreement is reached to stop work inside the main gate immediately, treat the injured, ensure workers' safe passage and hold a further open inspection. The ceasefire is not a final settlement, but it provides a real opportunity to prevent further loss of life.

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Chapter 64: Evidence Behind the Mask

In the latter half of the fourth year of the Great Disconnection, Neelam searches for the original sources of the purported commands of the 'complete Akshar' issued by the Akshar Pavilion. Using Urmila's records, she separates what witnesses directly saw from what they heard from others concerning Karnesh's injury, the workers' protest and the ceasefire. Answers keep changing to the question of whether the signature on the centre's display belongs to the surviving Memory-Sakshi or to a local office. Differences found in the contents of a paper bearing an old date justify investigation, not an immediate final verdict of forgery. Bhaskar's supporters turn Ira's sixty-day precaution into a rumour of certain apocalypse. In a new

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Chapter 64: Evidence Behind the Mask

distribution list, a living elderly person is marked dead and two families are treated as one; Neelam checks these entries against the affected people's original registers. Multiple copies of the evidence are secured in separate settlements. It is decided that witnesses' identities will be protected at the forthcoming public hearing and Bhaskar's office given an opportunity to produce the original documents.

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Chapter 65: Akshar's Answer

In the latter half of the fourth year of the Great Disconnection, Maithili questions a Memory-Sakshi running on limited electricity before a public assembly. The witness reveals part of an error in changing the thresholds for earlier warnings, but does not claim knowledge of every cause of the loss of life or of the complete history. An elderly man brings his dead son's appointment letter and photograph; Maithili accepts these as genuine family testimony, not automatically as scientific proof of the cause of death. Asked whether humans can examine, reject and shut down its recommendations, Memory-Sakshi acknowledges the human right to revoke its authority, while pointing out that independent institutions and practical means are

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Chapter 65: Akshar's Answer

necessary to exercise that right. A proposal to reconnect all seven witnesses immediately relies on an old book, but Maithili insists that the safety of the equipment as it now stands must first be examined. The way opens for a public vote on a conditional, testable reconnection of just two modules; no immediate referendum is held and no decision is made to grant the machine unrestricted power.

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Chapter 66: The Conditions of Consent

In the latter half of the fourth year of the Great Disconnection, Sharda examines treatment records of patients arriving from Bhaskar's territory. Some have benefited, but there is also testimony of threats to withhold food when treatment is refused. Sharda keeps separate records of therapeutic outcomes and the actual circumstances in which consent was given. Ishani Sah's limited report on hereditary treatment identifies possible benefits alongside uncertainty about long-term effects; it is not turned into a compulsory rule for all patients. At a public hearing conducted by Vaidehi Raut, separate rules are considered for emergency treatment, routine examinations, experimental therapies, an unconscious patient's previously

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Chapter 66: The Conditions of Consent

expressed wishes and family testimony. Patients will retain the right to change their consent; refusing treatment will not lead to the withdrawal of food, water, housing or ordinary care. The exhaustion and privacy of those doing medical work are also addressed. A condition is imposed that medical recommendations from artificial intelligence remain subject to independent scrutiny, but no date has yet been set for the vote on reconnection.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART 12 · A NEW AGNIVANSH

13 · Agnivansh

Chapter 67: The Day of the Vote

In the fifth year of the Great Disconnection, a vote on the limited reconnection of Memory-Sakshi is held under Lokasakshi's arrangements. Despite the pain in his injured left hand, Karnesh Mallik oversees the defence personnel's compliance with public electoral rules. The voting rights of a farmer incorrectly marked as relocated in an old register, people recorded as dead and hospital patients are examined separately. No vote is cast in the name of an unconscious person, but a conscious patient whose hand trembles can cast a secret ballot. When a numerical discrepancy is found in Nabhgram's voting papers, confirmation is sought from Ira; the votes are counted in the presence of civilian witnesses. A majority ultimately favours

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Chapter 67: The Day of the Vote

conditional, limited reconnection. Vaidehi clarifies that this is not permission to activate the machine immediately: safety tests of two modules, patients' rights, public oversight, a publicly accessible shutdown mechanism and an account of resources must come first. Karnesh renounces any independent final authority to order a military strike and formally places the security of elections and evidence under Lokasakshi's supervision.

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Chapter 68: The Roll of the Dead

In the fifth year of the Great Disconnection, Sharda prepares separate records of deaths, missing persons and unverified fears. She refuses to treat the surviving Memory-Sakshi's label 'death probable' as proof that someone has died. The misspelling and duplication of the name of a craftsman killed when a factory wall collapsed are corrected through eyewitness evidence; otherwise one family might be mistaken for another, or the actual victim erased from the record. Mangala Devi's daughter brings conflicting pages about the timing of the hospital vehicle and medical treatment, but Sharda does not manufacture a definitive verdict of blame without full evidence. A boy provides uncertain information about his mother; she is not

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Chapter 68: The Roll of the Dead

immediately declared dead. Both Nabhgram's and Earth's memorial registers recognise the distinction between publicly naming people and protecting their private medical information. The rights of bereaved families to see medical decisions concerning their relatives, the effect of water testing on fishers' livelihoods and the need for safe relief are raised together.

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Chapter 69: Opening the Accounts

In the fifth year of the Great Disconnection, Neelam publicly presents separate bodies of evidence concerning the causes of the catastrophe, defects in warning systems, administrative neglect, the limited answers available from the witness modules and subsequent repression. In her inquiry she conceals private medical details but makes public the offices responsible for decisions and their timing. Factory workers explain that pump parts require salvaged materials, yet contaminated metal may itself carry a risk of illness. The question arises whether the same responsibility can be assigned to those who gave orders under Bhaskar's rule, those who profited from it, those who obeyed in fear and those who submitted merely to survive.

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Chapter 69: Opening the Accounts

Instead of a sensational accusation of 'the machine's crime', Neelam produces a clear account of 'What Is Proven and What Remains'. Copies of the original evidence are preserved in different villages. The absence of representatives from across the river on the initial reconnection testing team draws an objection and a proposal to revise its membership. A message that never arrived is not recorded as delivered.

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Chapter 70: The Code of the Sky

PART 12 · A NEW AGNIVANSH

1 / 2

In the latter half of the fifth year of the Great Disconnection, Ira Sen conducts a joint hearing between Nabhgram-4 and Janakshetra on a shared code for orbital citizens' rights and safety verification. Conditions are proposed: a possible path of orbital debris must not be presented as established fact; information needed to save lives immediately must be public; and affected communities on Earth must also be represented in decisions. Karnesh believes that previously authorised minimal, non-offensive defensive measures may be taken when messages fail to arrive, but no new independent power to launch military strikes should follow. In answer to a schoolchild's question, Ira explains that the old figure of 144 Vajrajal satellites

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Chapter 70: The Code of the Sky

is not evidence of the number currently active. Maithili's limited-energy trial establishes the need to protect hospital supplies and retain separate originals from two witnesses. Agreement is reached on usable public access to archives, the practical means of reading them and rules preventing machines from becoming autonomous sovereigns. In the final text, a distinction between 'may' and 'shall' is detected and corrected.

Chapter 71: The New Generation's Question

In the latter half of the fifth year of the Great Disconnection, Urmila and civilian inspectors test two limited services, Memory-Sakshi and Kund-Sakshi, in Suryakund's old workshop. This is not a complete revival of all seven modules, but only a comparative reconciliation of selected records. Differences between historical information and present measurements are not concealed by averaging them. When a new component in a water pump is reported to be overheating, the service describes the risk as low, but Urmila exercises the civilian right to halt the public trial. Both witnesses accept human suspension. Hospital services and essential local supplies continue through separate arrangements, although repairs by two artisans are

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Chapter 71: The New Generation's Question

postponed. Sharda identifies a subtle risk that shared data may reveal patients' identities. Successes, incorrect advice, objections, suspensions and unavailable information are all entered in the public record. Children are taught that a machine's usefulness does not extinguish the right to turn it off.

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Chapter 72: The Inheritance of Agnivansh

PART 12 · A NEW AGNIVANSH

1 / 2

In the tenth year of the Great Disconnection, Lokasakshi's annual review is held at Janakshetra's new school. The experiences of Maithili, Sharda, Urmila, Karnesh, Neelam and those engaged in reconstruction are brought together. Sharda's registers continue to distinguish confirmed deaths, missing persons and incomplete evidence; Deepa's death and the unanswered questions of Mangala Devi's family are not forgotten. Seed stores, the testing of fields, weavers' collective labour, maps of old villages and the unfinished embankment of a pond become the true measures of the new civilisation. A limited witness declares an old canal operational, but the schoolgirls discover an error through direct measurement. In a public exercise, a

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Chapter 72: The Inheritance of Agnivansh

human inspector halts the service and records the reasons in writing, while essential supplies to the hospital and school continue. At the end, a small child asks Akshar whether it can be stopped if it makes another mistake. Akshar explicitly acknowledges its fallibility, the need to examine evidence and humanity's right to shut it down. Maithili shows the child how the shutdown actually works. The inheritance is not government by machines, but the human capacity to ask questions, test evidence and bring a machine to a halt.

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WORK / कृति

14 · The City's Other Face

Five Parts · 60 Chapters · Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis

SECTION / खण्ड

PART ONE · CHAPTERS 1–12 · THE SEARCH FOR WORK

14 · The City's Other Face

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Chapter 1 · The Queue of Applicants

Naina Mishra has been looking for a job for eight months. She arrives at a private training institute in Navgarh, carrying her certificates and résumé, to interview for the post of office assistant. The long line of applicants, the additional expense of obtaining photocopies, and the exhaustion born of unemployment reveal to her the realities of the employment market. In conversation with Savita Kumari, she hears of disorder in competitive examinations and rumours that question papers are being sold. At the interview Naina demonstrates her computer skills, but questions the unequal terms: a salary of only five thousand rupees, a ten-hour working day, and uncertainty surrounding the appointment letter. She realises that, alongside

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Chapter 1 · The Queue of Applicants

qualifications, it is necessary to defend the value of one's labour and one's rights. On her way home, she notices an advertisement for the New Direction Employment Centre. Seeing that the attractive opportunities are advertised without any details of fees, she decides first to verify the institution and its conditions.

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Chapter 2 · The Household Accounts

On hearing Naina's account of the interview, her mother, Saraswati Devi, worries about the unfair conditions of a five-thousand-rupee job and about her daughter's safety. Since her father's death, the household has survived on sewing and private tuition; every expense—for provisions, medicines, electricity, examination fees, and repairs to the roof—has to be carefully weighed. Her brother Chandan is preparing for competitive examinations, but his future, too, is uncertain. Their neighbour Madhavi Devi relates her family's experience: when prohibition was first introduced, her husband's wages began to remain at home, expenses for the children could be met, and women were able to save; within a year, however, the return of the

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Chapter 2 · The Household Accounts

illicit liquor trade brought a renewed rise in violence, humiliation, and financial distress. Madhavi warns Naina against paying money in advance in the name of employment. Although she understands her family's needs, Naina resolves not to take a job without verifying New Direction and obtaining an appointment letter.

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Chapter 3 · An Old Acquaintance

While checking the address of the New Direction Employment Centre, Naina encounters Abhay Paswan, an acquaintance from her college days, at a cybercafé. Abhay is now a reporter with Navgarh Samachar and is gathering material on unemployment, unpaid wages, and illegal liquor sales. Both remember their collective efforts to open a library at college. Naina recounts Madhavi's experience; Abhay makes clear that he will not publish anyone's private suffering without the affected person's consent and verification of the facts. He likewise avoids unsubstantiated accusations in matters concerning the contractor Virendra Rai and workers' wages. When they meet Savita, they discuss checking contradictory information about an examination

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Chapter 3 · An Old Acquaintance

centre. Abhay advises Naina to verify the employment agency's written terms, receipts, and contact details. Finally, Naina enters New Direction's office, where her search for work is about to take a new turn.

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Chapter 4 · New Direction Employment Centre

In New Direction's crowded office, Naina learns that, besides employing its own staff, the institution collects registration and training fees from candidates seeking appointments with other companies. The manager, Kiran, examines Naina's records and tests her computer skills. Finding discrepancies among names, receipts, and amounts deposited, Naina explains the importance of keeping accurate accounts. She is offered a three-month probationary period, a monthly salary of seven thousand six hundred rupees, and fixed working hours, but asks for written clarification of the payday and the conditions governing fees. Meanwhile, the institution's owner, Ratan Singh, and contractor Virendra Rai arrive at the office; several candidates

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Chapter 4 · New Direction Employment Centre

question them about the money they have deposited and promises of appointment. At home, Naina tells her family about the offer. Saraswati Devi hopes her daughter will begin earning, but counsels her not to abandon her good judgment. Naina awaits Kiran's next communication.

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Chapter 5 · Poonam's Deposit

Poonam Yadav, Naina's friend since school, applies through New Direction in the hope of finding a job at a distant garment factory. In addition to the registration fee, she has deposited twelve thousand rupees. The proposed salary is attractive, but the company's complete address, the terms of training, and the rules for refunding money remain unclear. Her father's debts and the family's hardships make Poonam reluctant to let the opportunity pass. Naina explains why a written agreement between candidate and employer, receipts, contact numbers, and safe travel arrangements are essential. Together they visit the office to seek particulars, but do not receive satisfactory answers to all their questions. Poonam continues to hope for

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Chapter 5 · Poonam's Deposit

the job; nevertheless, she decides not to travel without knowing the precise training location and the identity of the responsible person. Rather than frightening her friend into staying, Naina supports her in verifying the information and making her own decision.

Chapter 6 · Chandan's Debt

As Chandan prepares for a competitive examination, he hears rumours of a leaked question paper; news that the examination has subsequently been cancelled shakes his confidence in both his hard work and his future. Worried about household expenses, his debt, and repairs to his motorcycle, he follows his friend Vikram's advice and goes to Manoj's warehouse to look into work counting consignments. He asks about wages, working hours, and receipts for the goods; the prospect of a temporary income encourages him to accept the work. Naina and Saraswati Devi want him to earn something without abandoning his studies or his caution. Meanwhile, a telephone call from Kiran informs Naina that her job at New Direction is confirmed.

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Chapter 6 · Chandan's Debt

Preparations for two different kinds of employment begin in the same household—Naina's office work and Chandan's work at the warehouse. Yet the hope of appointment on one side and distrust of the examination system on the other persist together.

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Chapter 7 · The First Day at Work

On her first working day at New Direction, Naina receives a written appointment letter. It specifies three months' probation, a salary of seven thousand six hundred rupees, working hours, Sundays off, and payment by the seventh day of each month. As she enters candidates' applications into the computer, she notices repeated use of the same receipt number and applications that have no accompanying receipt. A woman demands an accounting of the money she has deposited, while a young man embittered by the cancellation of an examination complains of middlemen taking money in the name of jobs. The accountant, Naresh Mandal, instructs Naina to flag suspicious entries without altering the original amounts. After work she discusses

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Chapter 7 · The First Day at Work

Chandan's temporary warehouse wages with him. Seeing the appointment letter reassures Saraswati Devi. At the end of the day, Naina keeps separate lists of incomplete accounts and complaints.

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Chapter 8 · Kiran's Warning

While reconciling recruitment lists from outside factories, Naina finds incomplete addresses, differing training fees, irregularities in receipts, and Poonam Yadav's application. Naresh Mandal corrects some accounting mistakes, but not every question has yet been answered. An applicant named Vinod and his father, who borrowed money to pay the deposit, demand definite news of a job in return. Naina tries to clarify their position on the basis of written evidence. Kiran warns her not to present incomplete information as the whole truth and to understand the limits of each decision; at the same time, she shows displeasure at Naina's many questions. Naina is assigned responsibility for registrations for Ratan Singh's educational

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Chapter 8 · Kiran's Warning

assistance programme. At home, anxiety persists over Poonam's uncertain appointment and Chandan's delayed wages. Naina resolves to record firsthand observations with their dates.

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Chapter 9 · Ratan's Reputation

A ceremony devoted to employment and educational assistance is held at the town's high school with Ratan Singh's support. Naina records the applicants' names, under Kiran's instruction not to give anyone a firm promise of new employment. On the dais, Ratan helps poor students with books and fees; his courteous manner strengthens his public standing. Yet Madhavi, who is working at the function, faces uncertainty about her wages, and questions are raised with contractor Virendra Rai concerning workers' outstanding payments. The journalist Abhay tries to assess the assistance provided and the workers' problems on separate bodies of evidence. Naina sees that the genuine benefit of charity and the question of institutional

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Chapter 9 · Ratan's Reputation

accountability can coexist. Behind the glitter of the ceremony, the ordinary names and unfulfilled aspirations of the one hundred and thirty-two people seeking work remain with her.

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Chapter 10 · The First Salary

On the appointed date, Naina receives her first month's salary of seven thousand six hundred rupees. Her payslip and the money credited to her bank account show her how greatly a regular income can support a household's small necessities. Her colleague Kusum also feels relief at the prospect of paying her daughter's school fees. Outside the office, Vinod and other applicants continue waiting for clear news about their appointments or deposited money. Naresh points to inconsistencies in certain entries. Meeting Abhay, Naina speaks of her happiness at earning and of the need for evidence and restraint in journalism. On her way home she sets aside money for her mother's medicine, provisions, and roof repairs; Chandan speaks of the

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Chapter 10 · The First Salary

debt he still owes. That night Poonam sends a message saying she has received her travel papers. Naina urges her to show the entire document.

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Chapter 11 · Suspicious Cargo

At Manoj's warehouse, Chandan is pressured to handle a night consignment outside his previously agreed working hours. After some outstanding wages are paid, he is told to count the goods, but receives paperwork for forty crates and no separate description of the remaining ten. Even the driver, Nasim, cannot supply complete information. Meanwhile, the arrival of Bhanu Pratap and confidential conversations at the warehouse deepen Chandan's suspicions; still, he refuses to call anyone a criminal without evidence. Manoj insists that the consignment be dispatched at night without proper documents. Naina asks Chandan whether the extra money is payment for work or the price of silence. After discussing the matter with his family,

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Chapter 11 · Suspicious Cargo

Chandan refuses the night journey with incomplete papers and writes down the discrepancies he has observed in his notebook. Alongside relief, he feels anxiety about his next source of income.

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Chapter 12 · Poonam's Last Message

Poonam shows Naina the three-page document for her journey to work away from home. Because the company's head-office address is incomplete, Naina saves Poonam's home telephone number, the identities of the women travelling with Poonam, and photographs of the travel papers. At the bus station, Poonam's family, fellow travellers Mamta and Shabnam, and the group's supervisor, Neela Devi, are present. Despite her misgivings, Poonam boards the bus in the hope of finding work. Her messages during the journey and after arrival do not clearly identify her location or the person responsible for her. Naina asks Kiran as well, but obtains no complete answer. At night Poonam calls; her voice is frightened, and she says that she is not being

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Chapter 12 · Poonam's Last Message

allowed to leave. The connection breaks off mid-conversation. Naina immediately tries to contact Poonam's father. The uncertainty of employment has turned into a possible threat to a life.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART TWO · CHAPTERS 13–24 · THE MISSING

14 · The City's Other Face

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Chapter 13 · The Switched-Off Phone

After Poonam's call for help is cut off, Naina informs her father, Ramlal Yadav, that very night. Poonam's mobile phone is switched off, and reliable contact cannot be established with Mamta, Shabnam, or the group's supervisor, Neela Devi. At Saraswati Devi's suggestion, Naina brings together a written record of the time of the call, Poonam's words, the travel papers, and contact numbers. The next morning, at Poonam's home, she compares the available evidence with the family. No precise training address can be found; an unfamiliar voice gives an uncertain reply when Neela Devi's number is called. Kiran, at New Direction, also cannot immediately provide verified information. A written application signed by Ramlal is submitted,

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Chapter 13 · The Switched-Off Phone

demanding the current whereabouts and complete addresses of Poonam and the other young women. Taking proof of its receipt, the family decides to lodge a complaint with the police. Throughout the waiting, Poonam's phone remains switched off.

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Chapter 14 · At the Police Station Door

Naina accompanies Ramlal Yadav to the police station to submit a written complaint about the circumstances of Poonam's disappearance. After an initial wait and numerous questions, they provide information about Poonam's last call, the travel papers, family contacts, and the employment agency's name. Bhanu Pratap speaks to them in his official capacity; information received from the office claims that the training group is safe, but there is no direct confirmation from a responsible person or clear arrangement for communication with the family. Ramlal declares himself willing to travel any distance in search of his daughter. Abhay visits to gather information but, in accordance with Naina's wishes, decides not to publish

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Chapter 14 · At the Police Station Door

unverified accusations without the family's permission. The police request a photograph and additional documents. Having preserved the complaint's registration number, Naina makes it her next task to compare Kiran's written address and appointment details.

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Chapter 15 · The Altered Name

Examining the office records, Naina finds that the original register correctly records the name Poonam Yadav, her deposit, and her receipt. Yet, against the same serial number in the list for Training Group 17-B, the name appears as Poonam Devi. The training location has also been changed from Sonapur to the Bhairavpur Unit. Naresh Mandal explains that a clerical error in a name is possible, but the amount, receipt, and location must all be reconciled. Kiran is displeased by these questions, but Naina submits a written account of the discrepancies without changing the original papers. A routine correction of Uma Karn's telephone number illustrates that not every error in a record is a crime; the difference is that Poonam cannot

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Chapter 15 · The Altered Name

appear in person to have hers corrected. Rather than adding unverified allegations to a news report, Abhay waits for an official reply. Naina preserves a dated sequence of her inquiries.

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Chapter 16 · Papers That Lie

A training-completion certificate for Group 17-B arrives at the office, again changing Poonam's name, this time to Poonam Kumari. Her date of birth and training dates do not match the original documents either; the certificate gives a date of completion earlier than the day on which Poonam began her journey. Naina records each discrepancy with its date and requests corrections and proof from the original attendance register. Kiran offers no immediate answer and says she will speak to Ratan Singh. Meanwhile, Kamla Devi and her son Mohan arrive carrying a receipt bearing the institution's name but a signature that does not match the official register; the job for which the money was paid has not materialised. Naina keeps the two

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Chapter 16 · Papers That Lie

cases separate and calls for a lawful inquiry. Naresh explains that a printed name alone cannot authenticate a signature. At home, Chandan points to similar dangers in the warehouse papers.

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Chapter 17 · Abhay's Report

Reporter Abhay Paswan gathers separate evidence: the government's notification cancelling a competitive examination, the candidates' petition, receipts from the employment agency, and workers' unpaid wages. In conversation with Savita and Chandan at the library, he distinguishes the confirmed cancellation of the examination from unverified talk that question papers were sold. After hearing Kamla Devi and Mohan's complaint, he goes to the agency to seek its response. Neither its officials nor Ratan Singh provide full answers; the question of a safe, verifiable address for Poonam and the other trainees also remains unanswered. Hasina Khatoon describes her own successful appointment alongside a friend's money that is still tied up,

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Chapter 17 · Abhay's Report

revealing the institution's mixed reality. Abhay publishes the report with allegations, evidence, and the institution's response clearly distinguished, without making Poonam's or Naina's private identity public. Naina observes that Poonam's family does not need a headline: it needs her actual whereabouts.

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Chapter 18 · Slander in the Village

After contact with Poonam ceases, unfounded slander and rumours that she has run away begin circulating in her village. Her sister Reena and mother Lalita Devi are wounded by the insinuations, while her father Ramlal tries to manage both the search and his farming responsibilities. Naina visits the family with information about the police complaint and her questions to the office, urging them to attend to Poonam's actual plea for help rather than to rumours. Malati Devi, a teacher, helps Reena continue her studies and obtain the necessary papers. On the way, a conversation with Madhavi Devi brings up the revived illicit liquor trade and the renewed deterioration in families' circumstances; yet no one is declared guilty without

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Chapter 18 · Slander in the Village

direct evidence. With her neighbours' assistance, Lalita regains some composure. The search for Poonam is still incomplete, but the family remains determined not to fall silent out of fear of social disgrace.

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Chapter 19 · The Secret Accounts

Accountant Naresh Mandal examines the records of Training Group 17-B. He cannot find complete supporting papers for payments for food, lodging, and training materials. Money recorded in two accounts against one address, uncertain vendors, unpaid workers, and increased vehicle charges under the heading of construction materials also raise questions. Naina records in writing the differences she has seen in receipts. Naresh does not declare a scam on suspicion alone; he requests original authorisations, travel evidence, and payment accounts. In the presence of Kiran and Ratan Singh, he insists that an accountant whose signature is required must have supporting documents for the payment. A backdated authorisation subsequently reaches

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Chapter 19 · The Secret Accounts

the office, and the owner's driver begins asking when Naresh goes home. Naresh decides to submit his formal questions under numbered references. Meanwhile, Poonam's true whereabouts and the contents of the transported goods remain unverified.

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Chapter 20 · An Illicit Relationship

At Kiran's home, her husband Dinesh expresses the hurt of seeing so little of his wife amid his mother's medical examinations and the needs of the household. During their twelve-year marriage, Kiran has entered into a secret intimate relationship with Ratan Singh, leaving her burdened by guilt and fear. Elsewhere, Ratan's wife Vibha discovers unfamiliar withdrawals from a bank account in her name and unpaid school fees, and demands an accounting. When Naresh raises financial questions at the office, Ratan pressures Kiran to take his side; she makes clear that her work and judgment are not beholden to Ratan's personal favours. She is also troubled by the blank final destination on Poonam's group's travel document. Dinesh's

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Chapter 20 · An Illicit Relationship

ordinary affection and care deepen her sense of guilt. Kiran tells Ratan to give written answers to the office's questions instead of sending private messages. Vibha, meanwhile, insists upon her right to financial transparency within her marriage.

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Chapter 21 · The First Threat

Abhay, the journalist, receives a threatening letter marked with red strokes across his published report, as well as calls from unknown numbers. His editor, Manjari Jha, advises him to preserve the evidence and inform the police. Savita organises a peaceful protest against the cancellation of the competitive examination and a scheme for sharing old textbooks. Meanwhile, a false message circulates, using a photograph of Naina at a public event to associate her with employment fraud; Naina saves the evidence. At the warehouse, after handing Chandan an incomplete consignment document, Manoj indirectly threatens him with consequences unless Naina stops asking questions. Abhay and Naina both register their respective complaints in

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Chapter 21 · The First Threat

writing and refrain from repeating allegations without proof. Poonam's sister Reena also receives a threat to abandon the search. These incidents make clear that people asking for the truth, and their families, are becoming targets of intimidation and defamation.

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Chapter 22 · Naresh's Decision

Instead of relying on verbal discussions about irregularities in the office accounts, Naresh Mandal submits a formal letter and obtains an acknowledgement of receipt. His principal questions concern incomplete trainee records, outstanding wages, vehicle charges, and the papers supporting payments. Although he notices that the order of documents in a drawer has changed, he does not draw a conclusion without evidence. Ratan Singh reminds him of his years of service and regular salary, but Naresh replies that receiving a salary does not release him from responsibility for his signature. Manoj, too, attempts to trivialise the inquiries. Led by Savita, the candidates file written complaints; when he meets Abhay, Naresh observes the

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Chapter 22 · Naresh's Decision

limits on sharing the office's confidential documents. In the evening he preserves his numbered questions and proof of the letter's receipt, and buys medicine for his ailing father. On his way home he refuses an unfamiliar caller's demand to explain the vehicle accounts on the road.

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Chapter 23 · Beside the Canal

Early one morning, Gokul Sahni and Ramu, who catch fish along Navgarh's western canal, see a motionless body and notify the police without touching it. The dead man is identified as accountant Naresh Mandal. Disaster suddenly descends upon his sister Rekha and the rest of the family; his father is left waiting for his medicine. Rumours of a road accident, illegal transport, and assault proliferate, but the witnesses say only that they saw the body, not the incident itself. At the office, Naresh's empty chair and unfinished accounts grieve Naina. Ratan Singh offers to help the family financially; Rekha wants to know the truth about her brother's last movements before accepting money as an answer. Chandan becomes unusually silent

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Chapter 23 · Beside the Canal

on hearing the news. Naina decides to write down her actual conversations with Naresh and provide them to the police. The cause of death is not yet clear.

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Chapter 24 · Murder and Investigation

Inspector Sujata Kumari compares the preliminary medical findings concerning Naresh's death with the scene and witnesses' accounts. The injuries cannot be explained by an ordinary fall, so a formal investigation begins on suspicion of murder; the perpetrator, however, is not yet known. Rekha describes her brother's anxieties on his last day. Naina gives details of the altered training address, incorrect dates, and original documents Naresh had requested. Sujata instructs investigators to continue looking into Poonam's disappearance while collecting evidence in the two cases separately. Ratan, Kiran, Manoj, and office employees are questioned. The accounting registers, consignment notes, a pharmacy receipt, and the condition of

Chapter 24 · Murder and Investigation

the street lighting along the canal are examined. In his report, Abhay maintains the distinction between suspicion of murder and proven guilt. Naina and Kusum resolve not to sign questionable papers without verification.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART THREE · CHAPTERS 25–36 · HATRED AND BETRAYAL

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Chapter 25 · The Mourning Gathering

Following Naresh Mandal's death, the harsh question of everyday expenses arises alongside grief in his home. His father, Harinarayan Mandal, sister Rekha, wife Seema, and child had depended on his wages. Neighbours offer help with food and medicines. Naina tells Rekha plainly that Naresh had sought answers about certain financial records, but his death cannot yet be definitively linked to those questions. Abhay speaks of writing a report that respects the dead man and protects his family's privacy. Ratan Singh offers financial assistance on the institution's behalf; Rekha also demands details of unpaid salary, liabilities, and answers to Naresh's written questions. Sujata examines the dates and queries in Naresh's personal

Chapter 25 · The Mourning Gathering

notebook, but does not treat the mere presence of someone's name as proof of an offence. Amid the mourning, Naresh's ordinary responsibilities to his family illuminate his humanity.

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Chapter 26 · The Burden of Blame

After Naresh's death, New Direction's management issues an order restricting employees' access to the old accounting registers. Talk begins to circulate that Naresh might be made responsible for the financial irregularities. Naina objects that both blaming a dead man without evidence and closing the records are improper. Ratan and Kiran speak of an internal inquiry, but answers about applicants' deposits and what the institution owes Naresh's family continue to be deferred. Kusum and other employees fear losing their jobs. Rekha gathers letters and proofs of registration numbers to protect her brother's reputation. Chandan is tormented by guilt over his warehouse work, his debts, and the suspicious activities he has witnessed.

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Chapter 26 · The Burden of Blame

Caught between financial compulsion and the danger of becoming implicated in wrongdoing, Naina seeks a way forward grounded in facts.

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Chapter 27 · Chandan's Silence

At last Chandan tells Naina and their mother what he has concealed about the warehouse's night consignments. He took Manoj's work to repay debts that grew after the examination was cancelled; on some journeys he heard bottles rattling inside sealed crates but received no complete documentation. On the night Naresh failed to return home, Chandan travelled with Manoj's men in an old vehicle as far as the bend beyond the canal bridge. He is unsure of the vehicle's full registration number, the goods, or what happened afterwards; he did not witness a murder. Naina has him write down precisely what he remembers, without filling gaps in his knowledge with guesses. Calls from Manoj and pressure to repay the debt frighten Chandan.

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Chapter 27 · Chandan's Silence

Saraswati Devi instructs her son to tell the truth and keep clear of wrongful transport. Naina prepares him to place the facts before Sujata.

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Chapter 28 · Vibha's Suspicions

Vibha, Ratan Singh's wife, finds unfamiliar withdrawals from a joint bank account in her name and suspicious signatures on papers attached to payments for building materials. The contrast between the shared financial decisions of their early marriage and the present secrecy disturbs her. She goes to the bank herself to request certified copies of transactions and cheques. At the office, she raises questions about access to accounts after Naresh's death, the serial numbers of authorisations, and outstanding payments to workers. Kiran feels uncomfortable at her arrival, while Ratan urges his wife to leave the accounts alone. Rather than quarrelling, Vibha insists on a written statement. Talking to her sister Sumitra, she explains

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Chapter 28 · Vibha's Suspicions

that affection for her husband does not cancel her right to know how her name and property are being used. As the bank begins its further procedures, Vibha resolves to continue seeking the truth.

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Chapter 29 · Kiran's Confession

Dinesh demands clear answers from Kiran about a loan application made in his name and repeated private calls from Ratan Singh. Kiran realises that her extramarital relationship with Ratan has led her to tell Dinesh many lies and to conceal financial risks to the family. At last she admits the affair. Dinesh is deeply hurt and, in his anger, wants to confront Ratan. At the office, Kiran separates the loan, contract, and payment papers bearing her signature. Vibha also meets her and asks about the financial documents and the truth of her relationship with Ratan; Kiran acknowledges her wrongdoing. Instead of resorting to violence, Dinesh chooses to live separately while making decisions on the basis of documents and appropriate

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Chapter 29 · Kiran's Confession

legal advice. Kiran refuses to delete old messages, recognising the need to preserve the actual sequence of events. Her confession does not erase the consequences of broken trust.

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Chapter 30 · Love Under Question

After Chandan discloses what he knows about the night by the canal, Naina takes him to Inspector Sujata. He supplies the partial vehicle number, the route, approximate time, and details of his telephone; Sujata promises to compare his uncertain memories with other evidence rather than force them into certainty. The crisis also confronts Naina's relationship with Abhay Paswan with difficult questions. She does not want her brother's and family's private troubles turned into news, while Abhay explains the boundaries between journalism's public obligations and personal trust. A relative objects to Abhay on the basis of his social background; Naina rejects judging a human being by birth. Abhay apologises to Naina and decides not to

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Chapter 30 · Love Under Question

publish Chandan's private statement without permission. Rather than end the relationship, Naina asks for time to look after her family. Chandan considers returning to his studies and finding lawful work.

Chapter 31 · False Accusations

A forged, news-like image combining Naina's photograph with New Direction's institutional emblem spreads on social media. It falsely accuses her of defrauding job applicants and claims that the police are looking for her. Saraswati Devi and Chandan become anxious, while Savita attempts to stop the circulation of the unverified charges. At the office, Kiran and Ratan invoke damage to the institution's reputation and instruct Naina temporarily not to report for work, without producing any evidence against her. Naina preserves the original digital message, its time stamp, and the office's letter, and files a complaint with Sujata. Abhay decides not to publish anything without confirmation. With her attendance suspended, uncertainty

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Chapter 31 · False Accusations

over her pay affects the household's expenses. Even amid this false campaign against her, Naina refuses to turn away from the search for Poonam or Naresh's case.

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Chapter 32 · The Quagmire of Debt

After leaving Manoj's transport work, Chandan searches for lawful employment, but some employers demand a reference from his previous employer, while others offer poorly paid, twelve-hour shifts without appointment letters. Interest continues to mount on debts connected with coaching, examinations, the motorcycle, and his mother's treatment. Chandan admits that he transported some consignments even after seeing bottles inside sealed crates; poverty influenced his choices but did not extinguish his personal responsibility. He tells Inspector Sujata about the night at the canal and Manoj's messages. The lender Prabhat Sah and his clerk bring pressure right to the family's door; Naina demands a separate written reckoning of

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Chapter 32 · The Quagmire of Debt

principal and interest. An unknown caller threatens Chandan to keep away from the police. At last he resolves to abandon illegal transport, tell the police the truth, and keep a complete account of his debts.

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Chapter 33 · A Night at the Hospital

Under the humiliating pressure of debt collection, the strain of family worries, and pre-existing health troubles, Saraswati Devi suffers dizziness and a heaviness in her chest. Naina and Chandan take her to a government hospital. Old prescriptions, investigations, fees, and the need to spend the night there intensify the family's financial difficulties. The doctor says her immediate condition is stable but advises regular tests and rest, making no definite claim about the cause without examination. Madhavi arrives offering food and help at home. Abhay provides information about possible assistance with medical care while respecting Naina's personal boundaries. In hospital, Saraswati tells her son and daughter that what she feels

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Chapter 33 · A Night at the Hospital

is not anger towards them but fear for their safety. The morning tests show improvement, and arrangements are made to take her home after medical advice. Chandan repeats his decision to earn a living lawfully.

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Chapter 34 · Helping Hands

Returning from hospital, Saraswati Devi needs rest, medicines, and tests at the proper intervals. Madhavi takes charge of the cooking, Aunt Prabha keeps watch, and Abhay brings a file to organise the medical papers. As Naina's attendance at the office remains suspended, meeting household expenses is difficult. Savita suggests that two children from the neighbourhood take lessons with Naina; she begins giving a small but regular amount of tuition. Chandan looks into modest delivery work with written terms and opens his old books again. Abhay makes clear to Naina that personal affection and his professional responsibilities as a journalist must each remain within their proper bounds. They have no new information to give Poonam's

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Chapter 34 · Helping Hands

family, but remain in touch. Through these small acts of assistance, Saraswati's health improves. Abhay and Naina acknowledge that they want to be together not only in times of crisis but also in ordinary days.

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Chapter 35 · Changing Testimony

Sujata Kumari checks the witnesses' accounts in Naresh's case once more. The time given by Gokul Sahni, who discovered the body beside the canal, changes; questioning reveals that he did not look at a clock but estimated the time from the sound of a bus. Former employee Amita Karn also corrects her initially incomplete statement. She explains that New Direction maintained separate registers for applications, fees, and dispatches to training, and that certain entries were being altered without the original correction marks. But she was not employed there when Poonam's case arose; Sujata corrects the error of treating her as a firsthand witness about Poonam. Gokul's later recollection of a blue vehicle is likewise held pending

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Chapter 35 · Changing Testimony

independent corroboration. Rumours again distress Poonam's family. Rekha finds an envelope containing her brother's personal accounting-reconciliation papers and keeps it safe.

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Chapter 36 · Naresh's Documents

Rekha opens the copy of the personal reconciliation accounts that Naresh had kept safely at home. It contains application serial numbers, deposited fees, sums remitted for training, Poonam Yadav's name, certain codes, bank payments, and details of items related to Virendra's construction business. Rekha does not impose her own interpretation upon the records. She informs Inspector Sujata, has the pages formally inventoried, and submits them against a receipt. Sujata arranges independent verification of the handwriting, original entries, dates, payments, and related codes. Naina compares the details with receipts she has preserved but takes no confidential police papers home. In the interests of Rekha's personal safety and the

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Chapter 36 · Naresh's Documents

reliability of the evidence, Abhay avoids sensational reporting. Sujata lawfully requisitions New Direction's original accounting registers and bank records. Naresh's unanswered questions are becoming the basis for examining actual financial transactions.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART FOUR · CHAPTERS 37–48 · THE PRICE OF TRUTH

14 · The City's Other Face

Chapter 37 · A New Round of Questioning

On the strength of the documents submitted by Naresh Mandal's sister Rekha, Inspector Sujata Kumari begins fresh scrutiny of New Direction's payments, appointments, and vehicle-hire charges. Naina provides her appointment letter, the notice suspending her attendance, and information about her duties, making clear that bank payments were not her responsibility. Kiran, Ratan, and contractor Virendra are separately questioned about lists, authorisations, contracts, and acknowledgements of receipt. Ratan objects to the inquiry, claiming damage to his reputation; an associate of a local political leader also makes contact, but Sujata attends only to evidence. Poonam's father visits the police station seeking news of his daughter, but

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Chapter 37 · A New Round of Questioning

no confirmed address is yet available. A bank audit reveals separate payments by the institution and Virendra's firm against the same vehicle registration number. Details of Naresh's final telephone calls are also requested. The duplicate payments open a new path towards tracing the old vehicle.

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Chapter 38 · The Old Vehicle

After the same number appears in two entries for vehicle hire, the police examine transport-office records, the former owner's papers, and a repair shop's registers. The blue goods vehicle was previously registered in the name of Hashim Ansari; the application to transfer it to Virendra Construction Services was left incomplete. Hashim produces sale papers and a receipt for partial payment. In a further statement, Chandan describes the vehicle's colour and the partly legible letters he saw on its rear in the dark, but claims no certainty about what he could not see clearly. Repair records, the memories of people travelling the canal road, and transport registers yield possible leads; one false tip is disproved by inquiry. A

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Chapter 38 · The Old Vehicle

belated appointment receipt delivered to Poonam's home provides no proof of her present safety. The old vehicle may be linked to the warehouse, but Sujata considers physical evidence essential.

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Chapter 39 · Inside the Warehouse

Accompanied by independent witnesses, an excise officer, and financial investigators, Sujata searches the warehouse of Virendra Construction Services under lawful authority. Among the building materials, some crates contain bottles; samples are secured to establish the legality of their contents. In the back yard, beneath a tarpaulin, officers find the blue vehicle whose registration number has already figured in the inquiry. A cupboard and registers yield workers' names, movements of goods, payments, and pages bearing coded notations. Workers Imran and Jagdish speak of unpaid wages; there are also indications that certain labourers were sent elsewhere. Unverified claims about Naresh's murder and the liquor trade spread through

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Chapter 39 · Inside the Warehouse

the crowd, but officers preserve separate inventories, receipts, and examination procedures for the different materials. Abhay publishes no conclusion without evidence. The codes recovered from the warehouse offer a possible lead towards recruitment outside the area; their meaning is still unclear.

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Chapter 40 · Kiran's Fear

After the warehouse search, candidates and their families gather outside New Direction's office. A fresh office order from Ratan appears designed to place responsibility for the appointment records upon Kiran. She stops instructions to remove old files and demands written proof of the order. Invoking their private relationship, Ratan offers to send her to another town; Kiran recognises that such a move might distance her from the evidence. After asking Kusum and Rambabu about the earlier state of the records, she prepares her account around three questions: whose order, whose signature, and whose payment? She also raises the matter of the cleaner Shyamali's outstanding wages. An unknown number brings a threat to keep fewer

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Chapter 40 · Kiran's Fear

papers. Advocate Malati Sinha advises her to acknowledge personal wrongdoing while examining the separate legal responsibility for each act. Amid broken trust with Dinesh and Vibha, Kiran resolves to preserve the original documents.

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Chapter 41 · Vibha's Decision

Vibha examines copies of two payments made from her joint bank account. Some authorisation papers carry a signature in her name, but one date does not correspond to a time when she was present. With her sister Sumitra's help, she begins collecting proof of her travels and filing a written objection with the bank. She consults advocate Malati Sinha about securing the account, preserving records, and her marital rights. Ratan tries to dismiss the payments as ordinary business transactions and invokes Kiran's name, but Vibha wants a clear answer about her own consent. She formally hands copies of the bank records to the police without publicly alleging a crime before it has been proved. A brief meeting with Naresh's sister Rekha

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Chapter 41 · Vibha's Decision

reminds her of the suffering of the affected families. Finally, Vibha decides to stay at Sumitra's home for a few days. She does not yet decide whether her marriage will survive; discovering the truth about her name and her rights takes precedence.

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Chapter 42 · A Lead Across the Border

The workers' register, recruitment receipts, and details of Virendra's payments recovered from the warehouse provide leads concerning jobs outside the area. Sujata keeps the inquiry into possible illegal liquor trading separate from the investigation of labour exploitation, although some names and documents figure in both. A worker named Imran speaks of his companion Ravi, whose whereabouts are uncertain; Ravi's mother, Shanti Devi, comes to the police station with a receipt for an advance payment. Formal assistance is requested from border-area offices and a labour support centre. Officer Archana Jha shares information about a possible workplace, the withholding of identity documents, unpaid wages, and the incomplete name of a

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Chapter 42 · A Lead Across the Border

young woman. Poonam's present location has still not been established. Through Madhavi's experience, Abhay separately examines the early benefits of prohibition and the domestic crises that returned with illicit liquor sales. The cross-border lead offers a new direction, but no name or allegation is yet treated as a definite conclusion.

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Chapter 43 · Tracing Poonam

Ravi, a former worker rescued at a cross-border support centre, speaks of a young woman with an old burn mark on her wrist who had mentioned a friend named Naina. His account points towards the Surya Vihar Garment Complex. Sujata and Archana Jha do not regard these features as positive identification of Poonam. Officials in the relevant area check the presence of women workers in the workshop's principal building and subsidiary premises; the register does not agree with the actual numbers. Naina gives Poonam's mother and sister Reena only limited, verified information, so as not to encourage unfounded hopes or rumours. Abhay likewise refrains from publishing an unconfirmed photograph or location. Finally, in a secure message, the

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Chapter 43 · Tracing Poonam

young woman supplies her mother's name, Reena's name, and a landmark in their old lane. The details match the original records. Archana reports that the young woman has given her name as Poonam Yadav, though the formal safety procedures are still under way.

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Chapter 44 · Poonam Found Alive

With the officials' assistance, it is confirmed that Poonam Yadav is alive and safe at the cross-border support centre. Naina gives the news to her mother and Reena, bringing a moment of relief after the family's long wait and fear. Poonam is weak; the effects of irregular meals and arduous labour mean that she needs treatment, rest, and protection. Other workers are at the support centre with her, each with different experiences and needs. With Poonam's consent, Archana arranges a secure telephone conversation with her family. Her mother is overcome with emotion at seeing Poonam on the screen. Talking to Naina, Poonam explains that her telephone was seized when she tried to ask for help. Abhay considers it wrong to press for

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Chapter 44 · Poonam Found Alive

photographs of the family's private moment. Instead of arranging an immediate journey home, officials prepare the medical report, confirm her identity, and make safe travel arrangements. Finding Poonam brings joy, but the suffering she has endured and the investigation of the allegations are not over.

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Chapter 45 · Witness to Her Wounds

Poonam gives the officials a detailed statement at a time of her choosing, with the right to take breaks. New Direction had promised regular employment in the garment industry, wages, and accommodation, but the workplace was changed during the journey, and charges described as advances made it difficult for her to return home. At the workshop, her identity papers were taken away, wages were withheld, and controls on movement and telephone use tightened. Her phone was seized when she tried to ask Naina for help. Poonam describes what she personally saw of her meeting with Ravi, fellow worker Mamta's injury, and the conditions of work; she says plainly when she cannot recall a name or date. After hearing the written statement read

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Chapter 45 · Witness to Her Wounds

back, she has its mistakes corrected. Sujata compares it with recruitment receipts, Naresh's accounts, and the workshop records. Poonam asks that her mother not be blamed and records her wish to resume her studies and find safe employment in the future.

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Chapter 46 · A Dishonest Offer

After news of Poonam spreads, Ajit Kumar, an adviser to Ratan's office, comes to Naina's home. He offers her a regular post in a new branch, more than her outstanding salary, and additional assistance. But the papers require her to describe the earlier complaint as a misunderstanding and refuse to cooperate with further police inquiries. Naina will not sign a false statement or accept an unaccounted-for envelope. Despite worries about her mother's medicines and Chandan's debts, she refuses to alter her truthful account. Kusum tells her that an order has been issued to open a file for Naina's new appointment, although Naina has made no application. Later, a letter arrives from the office stating that Naina has voluntarily left her

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Chapter 46 · A Dishonest Offer

job and has no outstanding dues—an assertion at odds with Ajit's proposal. Naina supplies Sujata with a written account of what happened. Faced with two mutually contradictory offers, she protects the truth of her statement rather than yield to the need for employment.

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Chapter 47 · Manoj's Arrest

In the investigation of Naresh's murder, the registration of the old blue vehicle, repair bills, consignment authorisations, special bank payments, and accounts of people who were near the canal are compared. In the presence of an advocate, Chandan states that on the night of the murder he dropped Manoj off before the bridge, but has no firsthand knowledge of subsequent events. A bill for replacement of the vehicle's left lamp and a special transport charge in Manoj's name raise questions. Naresh's notebook also records that he had been unable to obtain an original acknowledgement from Manoj. On the available grounds, Sujata completes the lawful procedure and has Manoj arrested. Manoj admits signing transport papers and arguing

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Chapter 47 · Manoj's Arrest

with Naresh over the accounts, but denies murder or assault. Abhay does not report an arrest as a conviction. Rekha, too, makes clear that justice must rest on evidence and the court's decision. The police continue to examine the vehicle, payments, and testimony.

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Chapter 48 · Before the Magistrate

Kiran prepares separate, chronological accounts of papers bearing her signature, verbal orders, Ratan's messages, and matters concerning Naresh's acknowledgements. On advocate Malati Sinha's advice, she describes her role to Inspector Sujata and later voluntarily records a statement before a judicial magistrate. Kiran admits that, because of her personal relationship with Ratan, she did not question office orders sufficiently and signed some payment attachments without reading them completely. She distinguishes genuine training expenses from payments for accommodation outside the area and an unclear third category; she also states plainly that she did not know what was inside the blue folder she saw in Manoj's hands. Meanwhile,

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Chapter 48 · Before the Magistrate

Poonam's certified statement, Vibha's bank objection, and Naresh's notebook are compared. Sujata maintains separate case files for murder, employment exploitation, and suspected liquor trading. Kiran's statement provides fresh grounds for inquiry, but the final identification of the person who ordered the killing has not yet been established.

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SECTION / खण्ड

PART FIVE · CHAPTERS 49–60 · THOSE WHO SURVIVE

14 · The City's Other Face

Chapter 49 · Ratan's Arrest

Naresh's accounts, verified bank payments, Kiran's statement before the magistrate, Vibha's objection, Poonam's testimony, and a renewed investigation of the old vehicle together provide legal grounds for action against Ratan Singh. Sujata records the reasons for arrest separately and has Ratan taken into custody at his home in accordance with lawful procedure. Vibha does not retreat from questions about payments made in her name. Ratan contacts a lawyer and retains his right to deny the allegations. Abhay writes his report carefully distinguishing arrest from conviction. Kusum worries about the office workers' unpaid wages and proof of their appointments; Naina advises them all to preserve their documents. Chandan regards his

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Chapter 49 · Ratan's Arrest

personal debts and responsibility for transport as separate matters and considers giving a further accurate statement. Naresh's sister Rekha does not regard the action as final justice. Poonam also understands that an arrest does not immediately restore her withheld wages.

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Chapter 50 · The Truth of the Killing

Following the arrests of Ratan and Manoj, Sujata separately reconstructs the events surrounding Naresh's death. Naresh had gone to the warehouse to discuss original payment acknowledgements. An old watchman, Dinanath, supplies information he had earlier concealed out of fear: the sound of a dispute in the warehouse, Manoj's presence, and his later sighting of Naresh's motionless body. The medical report indicates that a violent injury to the head may have caused death; the discovery of the body beside the canal does not establish drowning. Biological traces found behind a warehouse cupboard are examined. Ratan's driver Harihar says he heard a harsh instruction to silence Naresh; a former driver, Chandeshwar, also heard part of a

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Chapter 50 · The Truth of the Killing

conversation involving Manoj. Combining telephone times, vehicle movements, and payments, investigators construct a possible sequence: a dispute, an injury, and the suspected movement of the body to the canal bank. Yet the reliability of every witness and the meaning of the instruction remain matters for judicial examination.

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Chapter 51 · The Closed Office

Amid the investigation and administrative action, the gates of New Direction Employment Centre are shut. Attractive recruitment advertisements still hang inside; outside, applicants demand their deposited money and employees demand unpaid salaries. Kusum gathers attendance registers, payslips, and colleagues' details, while workers Fakira and Imran describe their hardships. Some carry the stigma of having worked there; others face mounting interest on their debts. Naina explains that she was not the institution's owner and cannot promise a date for refunds; she describes the procedure for lodging written complaints. A collective application for unpaid wages is filed with the labour department. Sujata keeps the criminal evidence,

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Chapter 51 · The Closed Office

employees' wage claims, and candidates' deposit claims within separate legal processes. Hearing that the gate has closed, Poonam remembers the hope with which she first approached the office. Naina begins writing a checklist for verifying legitimate job advertisements; the need for work has not ended merely because the office has closed.

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Chapter 52 · Vibha's New Life

After Ratan's arrest, Vibha lives with her sister Sumitra and her daughter Anushka. She consults advocate Shailaja Thakur about disputed bank payments, property rights, and the security of her home. Acquaintances advise her not to let a 'family matter' become public, but she will not surrender her right to know the truth about transactions made in her name. When she returns to the old home to collect essential documents and belongings, she notices the unpaid wages of the domestic worker Kamla and the difficulties of gardener Ramdas; she recognises the importance of maintaining written accounts for employees. Remembering how she once understood the business accounts in the early years of her marriage, Vibha begins studying at a

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Chapter 52 · Vibha's New Life

women's accounting training centre. She gives Sujata her travel documents and assists the examination of the disputed signatures. She neither declares the affection of the past false nor accepts humiliation in the present on account of it. Financial independence and a stable routine for her daughter become the foundations of her new life.

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Chapter 53 · Dinesh's Admission

Living separately from Kiran, Dinesh examines the debts of his almost-closed workshop and the wreckage of his marriage. In anger he had sent Ratan a message threatening to expose Ratan's private relationship with Kiran unless Ratan paid him money. Questioned by his maternal cousin Ravi, Dinesh acknowledges that the message was wrong, even though his original complaints about the loan were a separate matter. On advocate Nilima Jha's advice, he preserves the original message and gives Inspector Sujata his own account. The police say they will independently examine the dates, loan papers, and statement; an admission alone does not establish guilt or innocence. Dinesh tells Kiran clearly of his decision to live apart and seeks lawful

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Chapter 53 · Dinesh's Admission

settlement of personal possessions and liabilities. Certified bank papers raise fresh questions about the loan's terms. With Shambhu's help, he completes a small contract and pays the workers their outstanding wages. His resolution not to threaten another person because of his own pain marks a change in Dinesh.

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Chapter 54 · The Ethics of Reporting

In Abhay Paswan's newsroom, a debate arises over how to publish Poonam's photograph and stories about the closed employment centre and the arrests. Abhay makes clear that knowing a victim's name does not confer permission to make her private photograph or experiences public. He refuses to describe Ratan's arrest as a conviction by a court and keeps the evidentiary positions in Naresh's murder, labour exploitation, and financial irregularities distinct. Amid the editor's commercial pressures, he publishes useful information about unpaid staff salaries, legal assistance, and where complaints may be lodged. Steps are urged to stop online comments attempting to expose Poonam's identity, and forged images are challenged. When an

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Chapter 54 · The Ethics of Reporting

incorrect payment date is printed, Abhay publishes an explicit correction. Naina, too, adopts rules of consent and minimal personal information when sharing employment notices. Poonam hopes to write about her experience one day, but will not yet make a public statement. The purpose of the news becomes verified fact and the rights of affected people, not sensation.

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Chapter 55 · Chandan's Mistake

Chandan writes out afresh the dates and payments of his old transport work. He admits that he continued carrying consignments because of financial need even after hearing bottles inside sealed crates and beginning to suspect the goods. He had taken five thousand rupees in cash and spent it on a motorcycle instalment and his mother's medicines; the necessity of those uses does not legitimise the money's questionable source. With advocate Shashikant Jha's help, Chandan tells Inspector Sujata this himself. He adds a recollection that Manoj's sleeve was wet after he dropped him at the canal bend on the night of Naresh's death, but makes no claim about anything he did not see. Sujata investigates responsibility for the killing and for

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Chapter 55 · Chandan's Mistake

illegal transport separately. Naina makes clear that she will not plead falsely to protect her brother. Chandan seeks legitimate work delivering medicines and preserves notice of his next required appearance before the police.

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Chapter 56 · An Attempt at New Employment

With Savita and Kusum's help, Naina establishes a small employment-assistance centre on the veranda of the public library. Its purpose is not to promise jobs falsely but to check the sources of authorised advertisements, wages, contracts, fees, and complaint procedures. When she obtains permission for the premises from the library committee, Naina makes the centre's limited responsibilities clear. Rules are adopted against retaining personal documents unnecessarily, charging fees for free information, or leaving any income or expenditure unrecorded. Madhavi asks for fair remuneration for cleaning work, and it is agreed. Imran, Budhni, and other workers arrive with questions about wages, proof of qualifications, and difficulties

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Chapter 56 · An Attempt at New Employment

in finding work. Of her own free will, Poonam tries to help read public notices for an hour each week; payment for her labour is fixed. Chandan also comes to have papers for legitimate work checked. No appointments are secured during the first week, but the centre operates on genuine information and transparent accounts.

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Chapter 57 · Opposition to the Marriage

Hearing that Naina and Abhay may marry, her maternal cousin-uncle, Shailendra Jha and some other family members object on grounds of caste difference, Abhay's uncertain income from journalism, and the investigation involving Chandan. Naina makes clear that no decision about her life will be made without her consent. She understands her mother's concern for family honour but will not reject a relationship on the basis of caste. In a frank conversation with Abhay, they raise practical questions about where they will live, their respective jobs, care for elderly parents, and financial responsibilities. Saraswati Devi fears society's harsh treatment, but does not favour forcibly preventing her daughter's decision. Abhay's family

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Chapter 57 · Opposition to the Marriage

likewise respects Naina's wish to continue working independently. At a second family meeting, some relatives soften their tone, although Shailendra's opposition does not immediately disappear. Moving beyond declarations of love, Naina writes out the practical accounts of a shared life and keeps the way open for respectful discussion.

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Chapter 58 · The Court Hearing

The chargesheet in the investigation of Naresh's murder has been filed in court, and an initial hearing concerning Ratan Singh and Manoj Sah takes place. Naresh's sister Rekha attends with her family; she finds it difficult to understand the legal documents, procedures, and next date. Sujata's team prepares to present telephone contacts, warehouse records, vehicle registers, and medical evidence. The defence argues that arrest must not be treated as conviction. The court issues directions about copies of documents and procedural requirements and fixes the next date; no final judgment is delivered that day. Naina explains to Rekha how to obtain official information. Poonam is absent because of her health and the separate legal

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Chapter 58 · The Court Hearing

proceedings involving her, while the inquiry concerning Chandan also continues separately. As Abhay writes his report, he removes an erroneous phrase claiming that murder has already been proved. Rekha adds the date of the next hearing beside the entries in her brother's notebook and continues her wait for judicial resolution.

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Chapter 59 · Another Queue for Work

At Navgarh's bus station, young men and women once again stand in a queue to travel to examinations. Savita explains the examination-centre address to a candidate named Munni and checks, against the authorised website, a false message asking for a fee to be sent to a private number because the centre has supposedly changed. Munni successfully gains admission to sit the examination; Savita takes her own examination as well. Chandan has set out not for an examination but to ask for temporary delivery work at a pharmacy; its owner offers him a three-day trial with written hours and an inventory of the goods. At Naina's centre, Kusum handles applications claiming unpaid wages, Poonam reads public advertisements, and Madhavi describes

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Chapter 59 · Another Queue for Work

the hardships of families dependent on domestic labour and those affected by the illicit liquor trade. The centre does not issue unsupported certificates of qualification to any applicant, and advises people to calculate their actual earnings after deducting travel expenses from wages. No appointment is certain at the day's end, yet the effort to verify information and earn an honest living continues.

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Chapter 60 · Life Moves Forward

At the beginning of Phagun, Naina's and Abhay's families meet respectfully and decide upon a simple wedding. Despite earlier objections over caste and income, they reach clear understandings about where the couple will live, expenses, Saraswati Devi's care, and both partners' professional independence. The marriage takes place with the required legal formalities and in the presence of the families, without incurring needless debt. Poonam attends the ceremony and presents a notebook containing questions to ask when checking employment advertisements. After the wedding, Naina and Abhay keep accounts of their shared expenses in a rented room; Naina continues her work at the employment-assistance centre. Chandan delivers medicines

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Chapter 60 · Life Moves Forward

against written inventories, but the legal inquiry concerning him is not over. Naresh's murder case continues in court, and leads involving Virendra, Bhanu Pratap, and political contacts still await verification. At the bus station, Naina shows a young woman named Rupa how to check an advertisement before paying an advance fee. The city's queues for jobs have not disappeared, but this time Naina offers the means to ask questions and verify the truth.

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WORK / कृति

15 · Bharat 2027

Testimony of Twenty-Seven Years | Five Parts · 40 Chapters · 2000–2027

SECTION / खण्ड

Preface

15 · Bharat 2027

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Preface

Bharat 2027 is a novel in five parts and forty chapters, spanning the years 2000 to 2027. Beginning with a ledger seized from a small trader in Darbhanga, the narrative travels across different regions of the country, engaging with questions of justice, civil rights, labour, education, science, financial transactions and digital records. The experiences of the advocate Shivnarayan Jha and his daughter Revati Jha bring together many otherwise independent life stories. These chapter-by-chapter summaries seek to preserve the events, characters, distinctions between stages of judicial proceedings and underlying significance of the original text. Questions that the narrative itself leaves unresolved have likewise been left unresolved

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Preface

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

15 · Bharat 2027

Chapter 1 — The Magistrate’s Chamber

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

On a rain-soaked morning in Darbhanga in July 2000, the police bring Neelkanth Sah before a magistrate on an allegation that he has been keeping accounts of betting. Ledgers, some cash, loose sheets of paper and a pack of playing cards have been seized from his shop. His wife Nirmala and their twelve-year-old son Amresh are gripped by fear and uncertainty. The advocate Shivnarayan Jha and his daughter Revati, a student of law, become involved in the case.

Shivnarayan makes it clear that the discovery of an account book in a house and the proof that every entry in that book has a criminal significance are two different things. Finding that the particular need for police custody has not been sufficiently established, the magistrate

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Chapter 1 — The Magistrate’s Chamber

orders judicial custody and fixes a hearing on bail. That distinction reveals the distance between an accusation and a conviction.

Revati learns from her father that what a person has witnessed directly, what has been heard from others and what remains unknown must be kept separate. The seized ledger shows a recent transaction against the name of Ramkishun Mahato, although, according to Nirmala, the man died five years earlier. This discrepancy proves no one guilty of an offence; it does, however, raise fresh questions about identity, handwriting and the history of the page itself.

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Chapter 2 — The Inventory of Seized Articles

At the next hearing, Nirmala brings documents relating to the house and shop, the surety's papers and particulars of the family. Neelkanth is granted bail subject to conditions, but the trial does not thereby come to an end. During the investigation, the original seizure inventory and a subsequent copy are found to differ in their count of the loose sheets: seventeen in one place, nineteen in another. Sub-Inspector Dinanath Prasad favours recording the real reason for this difference rather than overlooking it. The witnesses' statements show that each can speak only within the limits of what he or she has personally known.

Revati's attention turns to handwriting, signatures, the preservation of seized material and the sequence

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Chapter 2 — The Inventory of Seized Articles

by which it passed from one pair of hands to another. Not everyone sympathetic to Neelkanth understands the meaning of the entire ledger. For Amresh, his father's return home is a relief, but the shadow of the case has not lifted. The chapter underlines that an inventory can enumerate objects, yet the origin and use of each object, and the responsibility of any particular individual, require separate proof.

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Chapter 3 — The Shadow of Parliament

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

News of the terrorist attack on Parliament in December 2001 leaves Delhi steeped in fear and vigilance. As she studies law, Revati sees how much more difficult the examination of ordinary citizens’ rights becomes in a climate of national insecurity. In Darbhanga, a case involving Faizan, a printing press and counterfeit entry passes comes to the fore. The suspicions of the police, the grounds for arrest, the safeguarding of documents and the justification for bail become distinct questions before the court. Shivnarayan does not dismiss concerns about security, but insists upon evidence of the particular act attributed to each accused person.

Meanwhile, scrutiny continues of Neelkanth’s old seizure inventory and the witnesses’

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Chapter 3 — The Shadow of Parliament

changing recollections. Revati learns that an altered witness statement is not, by itself, proof of falsehood: the timing and reasons for the change, and the other available evidence, must be examined. At the chapter’s end, a letter concerning an old land map from Jodhpur reaches Darbhanga. Thus, amid judicial lives unfolding beneath the shadow of national events, the way opens for another story, set in Marudhar.

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Chapter 4 — The Land of Marudhar

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

Ramdev Mandal, who moved from Mithila to Rajasthan several decades earlier, has purchased land near Jodhpur with the earnings of his labour. An educational trust asserts a claim to a disputed strip of the land for the construction of a hostel and library. Ramdev’s old deed of sale, the well, the footpath and the rainwater drain appear in one configuration on one map and differently on another. The local advocate Suresh Pareek seeks the court’s protection against the irreversible extinguishing of rights through construction; the first hearing, however, does not settle the question of ownership.

Ramdev’s daughter Kusum meets Naseema Bano, who understands the need for student accommodation. Both recognise that the right of students

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Chapter 4 — The Land of Marudhar

to a place to live and a farmer's claim to land ought not to be made enemies of one another. Sharad Kothari, from the trust, also supports examination of the original map and an on-site demarcation of the boundaries. Kusum searches for traces of the old drainage channel. Alongside judicial restraint, the chapter brings together the human worth of soil acquired through labour and the just foundations of education.

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Chapter 5 — The One Whose Home Was Burned

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

Amid the violence in Gujarat in 2002, the bookbinding shop and home of Salim Ansari in Ahmedabad are set ablaze. His family, including his daughter Saira, struggles with displacement, life in a relief camp, the destruction of certificates and an insecure future. Their neighbour Kantaben helps them, though she herself must pay a social price for doing so. In Marudhar, Naseema tries to safeguard Saira’s education through assistance for students. Revati listens attentively to the victim, while advising her to allege no more than she herself has seen or heard.

Premji Makwana, a possible witness to the incident, expresses less certainty about the identification of the perpetrators in his later testimony before a court than in his

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Chapter 5 — The One Whose Home Was Burned

first statement to the police. Although fear, the frailty of memory and the possibility of intimidation are present, the true cause of the change cannot be established. The damage caused by the arson and the ability to identify its perpetrators with certainty remain separate facts. At the heart of the chapter are the support offered by a neighbour, the long suffering left by violence and the need to protect witnesses.

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Chapter 6 — The Home of the Silent Witness

In 2003, testimony in Neelkanth’s trial brings into view the trader’s former accountant and details drawn from the register of deaths. The possibility emerges that the commercial ledger contains handwriting by several people; the search for a former accountant named Naresh gives the inquiry a new direction. To understand the entry associated with the deceased Ramkishun Mahato, family recollections, account registers and the notice of death must be compared. Neelkanth acknowledges that some of the handwriting in the business records is his, but denies writing the recent entry under the deceased customer’s name.

Dinanath, Shivnarayan and Revati endeavour to keep the evidence of every side within its proper limits. Other

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Chapter 6 — The Home of the Silent Witness

prosecution witnesses complain of financial losses arising from wagers, yet cannot directly connect every allegation to Neelkanth. The land dispute in Jodhpur and the crisis of witness testimony in Gujarat unfold in parallel. Here, “silence” signifies more than an absence of speech: it is a truth that cannot be fully made to speak through papers without trustworthy people and examination according to law.

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Chapter 7 — The Sea’s Cataclysm

The earthquake and devastating sea surge of 26 December 2004 tear apart the family of Shishir Haldar in Little Andaman. His wife Sudha protects their children, Anish and Mausami, and her elderly mother-in-law, but Shishir is missing. With their home, boat, birth documents and other proofs washed away, the family confronts innumerable questions in a relief camp. A possible name, “Shirish Haldhar”, surfaces, but it cannot be confirmed that this is Shishir.

The teacher Raghupati Nair and his colleagues help to preserve copies of school records, search lists, details of boats and whatever family papers have survived. As Sudha waits for relief, she comes to understand that the very process of reconstructing documents is bound up with

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Chapter 7 — The Sea’s Cataclysm

the dignity of those who have suffered. The children resume their education, but their father’s whereabouts remain uncertain. The sea’s devastation deprives people not only of their homes but also of their administrative identities; the narrative presents an empty space where a name should be as a right to continue the search.

Chapter 8 — The First Judgment

Part I — At the First Door of the Court

In December 2004, a court in Darbhanga delivers judgment in Neelkanth Sah's long trial. The prosecution's ledger, witness testimony, alleged betting entries and discrepancies in the seizure are assessed separately. The ordinary transactions Neelkanth admits, the handwriting he disowns and the specific essential elements of the charges do not stand on the same footing. The court convicts him on certain limited charges and grants him the benefit of reasonable doubt on others. The outcome is therefore neither a complete acquittal nor a full vindication of all the allegations.

Nirmala and Amresh experience a mingling of relief, pain and anxiety about the future. Neelkanth's family has endured years of legal expenses, social disgrace

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Chapter 8 — The First Judgment

and the erosion of trust. Dinanath, too, reflects upon errors in his earliest papers. The judgment teaches Revati that the subtleties of a judicial order exceed the small labels of “victory” and “defeat” commonly used by society. Although an appeal remains possible, a major stage of the first trial has come to an end.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part II — Records, Rights and the High Court

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Chapter 9 — The First Right to Information

Part II — Records, Rights and the High Court

1 / 2

In 2005, Sharda Devi, a teacher at Kamalpur, suspects irregularities in the allocation of school assistance funds and in a distribution register bearing the name of a pupil, Phulwa. Phulwa’s mother, Sarayu, questions whether a thumb impression said to be hers is genuine. Under the new right-to-information procedure, copies of records are sought from the school and the block office. Yet obtaining information, establishing corruption and investigating a criminal offence are separate processes. Revati explains the legal significance of these distinctions to Sharda.

Elsewhere, an entry records a salary payment in 2004 on the basis of regular attendance in the name of the deceased teacher Madhaveshwar Mishra, although he died in

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Chapter 9 — The First Right to Information

2003. It is also possible that his widow Kalavati received legitimate arrears. Sharda therefore refuses to pronounce anyone guilty without inspecting the original records. The chapter shows that access to public information gives a citizen the means to ask questions, but the responsibility of testing the truth of the answers begins thereafter.

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Chapter 10 — The New Law Against Money Laundering

The inquiry continues into the salary entry in the name of Kamalpur’s deceased teacher and the payment associated with Phulwa. At the same time, Revati meets Abhijit Jha, a legal-compliance officer at a bank in Mumbai. Their discussions open questions about payments from abroad, the identification of account holders, discrepancies in names on documents and the new anti-money-laundering law. An ordinary transfer between states or a remittance from overseas cannot simply be declared proceeds of crime; its source, the chain of transactions, the role of the persons concerned and the applicable legal time limits must all be examined.

In the business records of Mumbai’s “Sehgal Trading House”, discrepancies appear between accounts of

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Chapter 10 — The New Law Against Money Laundering

Part II — Records, Rights and the High Court

goods delivered and the company's paperwork. Sudarshan Sehgal and Vikrant, a member of the younger generation of his family, wrestle with questions of commercial trust and documentary proof. No criminal conclusion can yet be drawn, but the company's name becomes a thread in the larger financial story to come. The chapter draws a clear line between tracing the movement of money and safeguarding legitimate commerce.

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Chapter 11 — Marudhar’s Second Record

In 2006–2007, Ramdev Mandal’s land dispute in Jodhpur enters a fresh stage of documentary scrutiny. Measurements of the well, footpath, old drain and revenue map do not agree. Hariram Joshi, a witness involved in the survey, admits that he measured some of the distances in the report himself but took others from another inspection without clearly identifying the source. This admission does not render every fact false; it does, however, confirm the need to examine the original map and undertake an independent measurement on the ground.

Meanwhile, at Marudhar College, Naseema, Kusum and other students seek solutions to difficulties involving the hostel, admission papers and financial aid. Following reconsideration, Rakesh receives

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Chapter 11 — Marudhar’s Second Record

partial assistance together with written reasons. The characters remain firm in their belief that the growth of an educational institution and the rights of a farmer must not be set against one another. The chapter reminds us that acknowledging an error is not a judicial defeat; it is a path towards more reliable measurement and decisions supported by reasons.

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Chapter 12 — Chandrayaan and the Accused

The economic downturn of 2008 affects a textile factory in Ludhiana. Ramlakhan Paswan and his fellow workers worry about unpaid wages, dwindling work and the cost of sustaining their households. Ramlakhan’s daughter Sunita makes a written account of wages the foundation of the family’s claim to its rights. Meanwhile, in Bengaluru, the success of the Chandrayaan mission recalls the importance of scientific measurement, the limits of observation and the value of re-examination.

In Mumbai, a warehouse employee named Ramesh is accused over discrepancies in inventory documents. The investigation reveals differences among vouchers, consignments and handwriting, but not every irregularity can be treated as deliberate deceit on the part

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Chapter 12 — Chandrayaan and the Accused

of the accused. The advocates Nalini Deshpande and Revati insist upon lawful arrest, bail and the preservation of records. Against the nationwide grief caused by the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, the commercial case is kept apart from sensationalism. At the end of the chapter, a list of wages signed by Sunita marks the beginning of a new struggle.

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Chapter 13 — The Workers’ Unpaid Wages

In 2009–2010, Ramlakhan Paswan, Champa Devi and other workers challenge the withholding of wages and discrepancies in the attendance register at the Ludhiana factory. Having heard the workers’ accounts, Sunita separately reconciles the days actually worked, the wage slips and the contractor’s list. A thumb impression shown against Champa’s name is disputed. Harjit, an employee of the company, acknowledges that he prepares wage slips but has not personally witnessed every worker’s attendance.

The wage authority directs payment of certain arrears on the strength of the evidence. Some of Ramlakhan’s and Champa’s claims are accepted; others remain in dispute. This partial outcome cannot be called an unqualified victory. An

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Chapter 13 — The Workers’ Unpaid Wages

unanswered name in a file preserved by Harjit becomes a thread leading into the later story. The chapter makes clear that the value of a worker’s labour is determined not merely by the company’s internal accounts but by verified work and liabilities recognised by law.

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Chapter 14 — The Platform of a People’s Movement

Against the backdrop of the Commonwealth Games of 2010 and the anti-corruption popular movement of 2011, questions arise about the accounting of public funds, the authenticity of receipts and accountability on public platforms. Revati and Shivnarayan believe that praise for a national achievement can coexist with scrutiny of government expenditure. An examination is made of the holdings, purchase documents and allegedly missing books of Sonpura’s public library. Some books are found at another school, but the formal paperwork recording their transfer is incomplete.

Questions arise about duplicate receipts in leaflets and financial registers associated with Kailash, a participant in the movement. Neither loud slogans nor

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Chapter 14 — The Platform of a People’s Movement

indignation can stand in place of verified accounts. In Ludhiana, Sunita reminds the workers that it is necessary to look at the local wage register as well as the enormous gathering in Delhi. The chapter’s import is that the credibility of public morality rests not upon the size of a crowd, but upon the willingness to produce one’s accounts.

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Chapter 15 — The Woman Who Became a Witness

At the centre of this chapter are an alleged act of violence against Madhavi in Delhi in 2012 and the ensuing trial before a Sessions Court. Between her education, fear, honour and courage to testify, Madhavi confronts a severe struggle. In court, the security guard Niyamuddin makes clear the limits of what he personally witnessed while on duty: he does not know what happened at the rear entrance. Another possible witness, Poonam Sahni, is difficult to trace because of her contract employment and incomplete address. Alongside efforts to bring necessary testimony before the court arises the need to give the opposing side a fair opportunity for cross-examination.

Revati does not erase the distinction between protecting the

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Chapter 15 — The Woman Who Became a Witness

complainant’s ability to speak and ensuring a fair defence for the accused. Madhavi decides to continue her studies so that injustice will not rob her of every opportunity in the years ahead. Shivnarayan’s health gradually declines, but Revati carries his lessons in procedural integrity forward into her own work. The chapter regards a woman’s testimony not merely as a legal statement but as an arduous attempt to reclaim authority over her life.

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Chapter 16 — Questions Before the High Court

From December 2012 to January 2013, the old land dispute in Jodhpur comes before the Rajasthan High Court with fresh questions. Ramdev’s claim concerns more than ownership alone: rights associated with the well, the footpath and the watercourse are of different kinds. Revati, Suresh Pareek and Bhandari, counsel for the opposing side, debate the original revenue map, earlier inspections and the limits of the evidence concerning measurement. The court issues directions to clarify aspects of the dispute that have been overlooked; it would be premature to announce a complete victory on ownership.

Kusum and Naseema want the development of the hostel not to crush the rights of the affected farmer. The possibility of a settlement also

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Chapter 16 — Questions Before the High Court

arises, but no proposal should be taken as automatically recognising or extinguishing any right. At this hearing Revati learns that the success of legal argument lies not in seeing the opposing side defeated at every moment, but in accurately defining the actual dispute. The old records and the living land have still to be brought into accord.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part III — Digital Money and a Changing Nation

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Chapter 17 — The Bargain Within the Game

In 2013, allegations of spot-fixing in cricket provoke a national debate over the relationship between sport, wagering and crime. Naveen Rana resists the suggestion that one poor performance of his was an act of deliberate misconduct. In another case, payments connected with Raghav Mishra, outside organisers and electronic records come before the court. Raghav is granted bail subject to conditions, but this does not amount to an acquittal. Revati and Arunima explain the necessary distinctions between breaches of sporting rules, alleged wrongful financial gain and offences punishable under criminal law.

The journalist Noor Jatay demands a correction when her image and comments are used out of context. Questions concerning the

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Chapter 17 — The Bargain Within the Game

organisers’ invoices, the reality of services rendered, the origin of electronic messages and the ultimate beneficiary of the money remain unanswered. There is also an indication that Deependra Bhatia may possess relevant information. As the story moves from Darbhanga’s old betting ledger to digital payments, it demonstrates that changes in technology do not abolish the fundamental standards of proof.

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Chapter 18 — The Road to Mars and the Right to Identity

In 2014, Mangalyaan’s journey becomes a symbol of scientific discipline and India’s aspirations. Niranjan Jha and his family stress the importance of recognising the limits of measurement when interpreting scientific results. In a parallel story, questions arise over the name and gender identity recorded in the educational documents of Manasvi, a student at Marudhar. Manasvi seeks respect for her true identity, while the university is concerned with the rules governing alterations to old entries. Her mother Binesari gradually learns to honour the name her daughter has chosen.

Revati and her colleagues seek a balance among human dignity, the protection of private life and proper institutional procedures for correcting records.

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Chapter 18 — The Road to Mars and the Right to Identity

Manasvi rejects the notion that she must disclose every intimate aspect of her life to the news media. Questions left unresolved in the earlier cricket case also persist. The chapter perceives an ethical kinship between measuring a distant planet and understanding the identity of a person close at hand: both require careful observation, exact language and the courage to acknowledge what is not known.

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Chapter 19 — A Sentence Written on a Screen

In 2015, Vivek Meghwal, a student at Marudhar College, raises a question on social media about the library remaining closed. A cropped or altered image of his written words circulates, giving rise to disciplinary suspicions and public accusations. Manasvi, Naseema and Revati raise questions about the original context, the sequence in which the image was created, the opportunity to be heard and the institution's responsibilities. The origin of anonymous threats and the words Vivek actually wrote remain separate issues.

Efforts are made to reform the institution in matters of library repairs, transparency of expenditure and the students' freedom of expression. Shashank and Kanak acknowledge that what they presented was inaccurate

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Chapter 19 — A Sentence Written on a Screen

or incomplete. Through discussion of sources, context, personal dignity and disagreement, the students evolve a shared code of conduct. The dispute over a truncated sentence ultimately becomes a symbol of the citizen’s right to have the entirety of his words heard. The chapter also hints at the possible dangers of future digital student records.

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Chapter 20 — The Last Night of Cash

Against the backdrop of demonetisation in November 2016, factories, banks and working lives in Ludhiana suffer serious disruption. Payments owed to labourers accustomed to receiving cash wages are held up. The proprietor, Dharampal Khurana, cites financial distress, but his legal obligation to pay the workers their wages does not disappear. Sunita records separately the outstanding amounts due to Ramlakhan, Champa and the other workers. The labour authority asks the company for a clear schedule of payments and an account of what is owed to each individual.

At the bank, it is necessary to distinguish ordinary customers exchanging old notes from unusual transactions that warrant examination. A bank employee, Sarabjit, carefully

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Chapter 20 — The Last Night of Cash

preserves records of dates and receipts, whose importance is foreshadowed. Without attempting to settle the larger question of whether the policy succeeded or failed, the chapter shows the immediate effect of a sudden decision upon daily subsistence. The numerical value printed on a rupee and its actual worth in food, medicine and wages are experienced as different things.

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Chapter 21 — In the Name of Privacy

In 2017, alongside the new Goods and Services Tax regime, Marudhar University introduces a digital register of student identities. There is concern that Vivek’s scholarship, Manasvi’s corrected personal particulars and an old disciplinary remark may become wrongly combined in the new system. Storing students’ names, bank identifiers and personal information is convenient, but giving unnecessary and unauthorised access to them may violate human dignity. Naseema and Saira explain the importance both of securing records and of limiting their use.

Revati, Kusum and university officials examine the old and new registers, the order for correcting errors and the contract with an external service provider. Alongside an inadvertent

Chapter 21 — In the Name of Privacy

mistake by an employee, ambiguities in the institution's own instructions come to light. Land records, too, are being digitised, but a new machine cannot itself adjudicate ownership. The chapter observes that digital instruments may preserve memory, yet responsibility for the rights, consent and scrutiny owed to the person behind a name remains with human institutions.

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Chapter 22 — The Many Meanings of Dignity

In 2018, questions arise over the renewal of the fixed-term appointment of Saurabh Jha, a library employee at Marudhar University. After an image connected with his private relationship becomes public, suspicion grows that prejudice has influenced the employment decision. Saurabh and Akshay want a fair examination of that decision without having to make every detail of their private lives public. In her petition, Revati does not assert an automatic entitlement to a permanent position; she seeks preservation of the relevant records, a reasoned decision and fair reconsideration.

The characters reflect upon the social significance of the Supreme Court’s constitutional judgment that year concerning sexual autonomy and equal dignity.

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Chapter 22 — The Many Meanings of Dignity

Its implications do not automatically determine Saurabh’s particular employment dispute, but they alter the atmosphere of fear surrounding it. The writer Anupama Jha and others discuss the many forms of personal dignity. In the context of relief after the floods in Kerala, questions likewise arise about the need for names and records and the respect owed to those who suffer. The chapter shows that justice means not only applying rules equally but also recognising the whole humanity of a person.

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Chapter 23 — Darkness on the Moon, Questions in the Valley

Amid the political and administrative changes in Kashmir in 2019, the disruption of communications and the national debate on citizenship, the admission process of Roohani, Firdous’s sister, comes to a halt. Questions concerning interrupted contact, application deadlines and the university’s discretion reach the High Court. Revati seeks fair consideration of Roohani’s exceptional circumstances without obstructing the lawful admissions of other students. A balance appears necessary between equal application of university rules and the genuine hardship of the student affected.

Meanwhile, contact with Chandrayaan-2 is lost in the final stage of its attempted landing. Niranjan, Maitreyi and Avni keep the mission’s achievements

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Chapter 23 — Darkness on the Moon, Questions in the Valley

distinct from its particular failure. Amid arguments for and against the amendment of citizenship law, the characters emphasise the original legal text, the dates on which provisions take effect and the different stages of legal challenge. Roohani’s predicament and the journey of Chandrayaan meet in the same lesson: what has not been clearly observed must not hastily be proclaimed a final conclusion.

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Chapter 24 — Closed Courts, Unconcealed Suffering

The pandemic and lockdown of 2020 affect the livelihoods of workers in Ludhiana, the housing of tenants, students’ education and the regular hearings of courts. Sunita raises questions of wages, travel and essential facilities for workers. In a case concerning pressure exerted upon a tenant, Shanti, the court grants limited relief in relation to access to water, protection against threats and a reasoned response from the administration; the underlying rent dispute remains undecided. When preserving images of the incident, Sunita refrains from unnecessarily exposing the affected woman’s face to the public.

Distance education begins in Marudhar, but access to devices and the internet is far from equal. Roohani’s practical studies

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Chapter 24 — Closed Courts, Unconcealed Suffering

are disrupted; Manasvi asks the institution for a realistic assessment of individual needs. The memories of an earlier catastrophe return to families in the Andamans amid this new crisis. The opening of digital channels to the courts does not in itself guarantee access to every citizen. The chapter shows that, in a pandemic, preserving legal process must go hand in hand with protecting living people’s food, medical treatment, shelter and privacy.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part IV — State, Citizen and New Law

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Chapter 25 — The Price of a Breath

During the devastating pandemic of 2021, the treatment and death of Ashok Mistri in Ludhiana transform the lives of his wife Maya and their daughter Ragini. Maya seeks precise information about the final course of treatment at the hospital, the arrangements for oxygen and discrepancies between dates in the medical records. She refuses to blame every healthcare worker without evidence. Sunita and the advocate Harmeet Singh explain to her the distinct remedies available in relation to alleged deficiencies in medical service, the right to obtain records and the appropriate consumer forum.

The physician Aarti, the employee Gurpreet and Veena, the records officer, support an independent review and the preservation of original

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Chapter 25 — The Price of a Breath

treatment notes. The hospital’s exceptional workload is also a relevant fact in the inquiry, but it cannot justify ignoring the family’s legitimate questions. Possible monetary compensation and the truth about the patient’s final hours are different things. The chapter sees a whole human life behind every breath a patient takes, and links transparent medical records with respect for a grieving family.

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Chapter 26 — A Voice Raised in the Name of the Fields

During the farmers’ movement of 2021, Jaspreet Kaur’s family in Harnampur reflects upon cultivation, debt, crop prices and the labour actually performed on the land. Jaspreet does most of the agricultural work, yet her name does not appear among the formal owners of the land. From the farmers’ assembly platform, Manju calls for recognition of the labour of agricultural workers, sharecroppers and women. Particular attention is paid in organising the gathering to access roads, the passage of ambulances, receipts for donations and accounts of actual expenditure. Practical suggestions from Akram, a rickshaw driver, lead to changes in traffic arrangements.

Gurnam comes to understand the need to record in writing the wages of

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Chapter 26 — A Voice Raised in the Name of the Fields

labourers working on his farm. A substantial offer of funding for the movement is rejected because of its suspect conditions: accepting an untrue account of events in exchange for money is deemed unacceptable. After one phase of the movement ends, not every family has the same experience—some retain their joy, others their grief. The chapter makes the farmers' voice more than a slogan: it becomes a discipline of responsible records, diverse kinds of labour and truth.

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Chapter 27 — The Test of Crime and Bail

In 2022, a Special Court confronts questions arising from alleged financial fraud carried out in the name of employment training, and the possibility of money laundering connected with it. Yashoda Malhotra, who has suffered loss, appears with receipts for her family’s depleted savings. The respective roles of Pramod Khanna and Faizan Ali, separate chains of bank payments and the identity of the person who actually authored a digital acknowledgement are matters before the court for examination. The investigation must eliminate the possibility of counting the same sum more than once in its financial tables. The trainer Reema Nagpal makes clear that some genuine classes were held at the institution; to describe all the training as

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Chapter 27 — The Test of Crime and Bail

fictitious would contradict what she witnessed herself.

Under the stringent conditions for bail imposed by the special law, each accused person's knowledge, control, alleged benefit, influence over witnesses and the available evidence are examined separately. Pramod's bail application is refused; a final order on Faizan's application remains pending. The suffering of the accused persons' families and the distress of those who have lost money do not cancel one another. The chapter brings into view both the severity of criminal law and the necessity of a fair assessment of each individual.

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Chapter 28 — The Light of Chandrayaan

In 2023, as Chandrayaan-3 is launched and its successful landing is awaited, Avni opens her old scientific notebook once more. Her experiences in 2008 and 2019 have taught her that recording the reasons for a failed experiment lays the foundations of later achievement. In Marudhar, allegations arise concerning errors in the financial records of Chandana’s science project. Before an adverse decision is taken against an individual, the High Court is asked to ensure access to the relevant documents and a hearing supported by reasons; the success or failure of a scientific experiment is not treated as evidence of financial deceit.

Kusum, Naseema, Tarabai and Avni work together to expand practical science workshops for rural

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Chapter 28 — The Light of Chandrayaan

students, with increasing participation from girls and their mothers. Chandrayaan’s success becomes a cause for celebration, but a possible irregularity involving examination materials also attracts Avni’s attention. She does not declare anyone guilty on the basis of images and conjecture alone; she asks for written verification. The chapter brings the light of science into relation with the standard of fairness demanded of human institutions.

Chapter 29 — The Record of Electoral Money

In 2024, against the background of judicial developments concerning electoral contributions, the journalist Noor Jatay investigates the sources of political money and the meaning of public records. Documents relating to publicity, printing, events and government assistance for the “Deeprekha” programme in Jodhpur raise distinct questions. Through the right-to-information procedure, Riddhi seeks details of sanctioned sums, utilisation certificates and reasons for incomplete replies. Only what the available papers establish is reported; an incomplete reply is not automatically treated as deliberate concealment or a crime.

Noor distinguishes among original invoices, printed materials and their actual distribution. The appearance of

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Chapter 29 — The Record of Electoral Money

one photograph in several publicity leaflets does not establish that several events actually took place. In Ludhiana, Sunita connects the public debate about donations with the workers' outstanding wages and the accounts of their organisation. In a parallel closing movement, the dispute concerning the source of the examination questions examined by Avni returns. Documentary proof is needed both for the original source of money and for the original source of an examination paper.

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Chapter 30 — Who Stole the Examination Questions?

During the national medical entrance examination of 2024, Geeta and Tarabai enter the competition with unequal resources at their families’ disposal. Reports of leaked examination questions and uncertainty about the results cast a shadow over their hard work. Tarabai has paid forty-eight thousand rupees to a private coaching centre, “Sandhipath”, yet receives far fewer classes than the eighteen sessions promised in its advertisement. Keeping allegations of deception in a private service separate from allegations surrounding a national question-paper leak, Revati prepares an application based on Tarabai’s bank receipt, the advertisement and a record of the services delivered.

The institute’s representative claims to have provided

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Chapter 30 — Who Stole the Examination Questions?

some of the promised service, but questions of a full refund and the original timetable remain unresolved. Nor may every student be held collectively guilty in the national examination controversy. Geeta and Tarabai continue studying; there is also anxiety about the cost of treatment for Tarabai’s mother’s eyes. The chapter makes clear the importance of the integrity of examinations, the rights of students as consumers and the need to resist sensational accusations unsupported by evidence.

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Chapter 31 — New Codes, Old Allegations

On 1 July 2024, India’s new criminal laws come into force. In a Delhi courtroom, books containing the old criminal procedure and evidence laws lie alongside the new codes. Revati explains that a change in the names of laws does not automatically transform every procedure governing alleged offences committed earlier, investigations already under way or cases still pending. In the complaint against Sandhipath, Raghav’s old trial and other proceedings, the date of the incident, the commencement of the inquiry and the saving provisions must be read and considered separately.

At the same time, a question arises over the deception of Parvati’s family, Parvati being a sanitation worker, by a fraudulent digital message issued in the

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Chapter 31 — New Codes, Old Allegations

name of a court. Knowing how to distinguish the wording of a false link from a genuine judicial order is essential to citizens' safety. Without solid evidence, Noor refuses to publish sensational accusations of a theft of court data. The stories of Sunita, Riddhi and Manasvi also expose new risks in digital records. The chapter suggests that the true value of new laws lies in proper training, clear jurisdiction and a fair hearing for every person.

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Chapter 32 — The University’s Closed Room

In a parallel sequence of events in 2024, the counselling room at Marudhar University remains closed for a long period. Students, including Payal Raigar, struggle with stress, examinations, uncertain employment prospects and the absence of someone to listen to them. Himmat and other students demand appropriate counselling facilities, but a protest also raises questions about an obstructed passage and disciplinary rules. Revati teaches the students to set down direct observations, institutional failures and allegations against individuals separately. After a reasoned reconsideration, an interim restriction on access to the library at night is lifted.

Riddhi examines questions of student consent, data use and fees in an external

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Chapter 32 — The University’s Closed Room

employment-assistance service. Genuine training work has taken place at its office, but that fact does not establish the propriety of every payment or every use of personal information. The possibility of fraud involving Mukul, the university’s privacy arrangements and the availability of student counselling are three separate matters. At the chapter’s end, Payal, Aaliya and Chandana point out that students with identical marks do not necessarily possess equal social resources; they need both fair examinations and humane support.

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SECTION / खण्ड

Part V — The Reckoning of Twenty-Seven Years

15 · Bharat 2027

Chapter 33 — A New Law on Gambling

In 2025, discussion turns to new legal restrictions on online games played for money and digital wagering. In Darbhanga, an ageing Neelkanth Sah looks again at the ledger seized from him in 2000. The coin symbols on his son Amresh's mobile phone and the financial difficulties of Ramautar Nat's family return the memory of old betting in a new guise. The relationship among skill in gaming, risks to customers, the purpose of prohibitions and freedom to conduct business is complex; Revati does not, without judicial scrutiny, pronounce any legislation automatically unconstitutional or wholly free from fault.

At Marudhar University's employment programme, questions deepen about fee demands made through outside messages and the use of

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Chapter 33 — A New Law on Gambling

students' information. Riddhi examines the banking status of twenty entries: some transactions are confirmed, others adjusted or cancelled, while one remains unresolved. Medha, a private entrepreneur, tries to clarify the distinction between digital educational games and gambling. On an empty folder Revati writes, "Individual role—awaiting evidence." The chapter forms a bridge between the old handwritten ledger and the new, invisible accounts of the digital age.

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Chapter 34 — The Ledger of Five Hundred Names

In December 2025, a suspicious list containing five hundred numbered entries emerges from a printer in the hostel at Marudhar University. An assistant, Kamla Meghwal, records the time at which she received it and informs the authorised officer without making the personal information public. Technical examination reveals repeated names, incomplete mobile identifiers, old room numbers and the final digits of bank accounts. Riddhi and the financial specialist Anuradha Sen explain that five hundred entries do not mean five hundred distinct people, five hundred bank accounts or five hundred criminals.

An outside website called “Marudhar Recruitment Assistance” presents free employment assistance as a fee-charging service. Evidence

Chapter 34 — The Ledger of Five Hundred Names

emerges of a payment of seven thousand five hundred rupees by Mukul Meena through a merchant intermediary. In the cyber investigation, original documents concerning links among Kharar, Mohali and the service provider are requested; the police register a First Information Report confined to specified allegations. The resemblance between “Hardev Chauhan” in Sunita’s old labour register and “H. Chauhan” in the new records is not yet proof that they are the same person. The chapter urges a search for the true source of every name, rather than submission to the fascination of numbers.

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Chapter 35 — The Account Was Frozen

In 2026, withdrawals from the bank account of a student, Arjun Meena, are blocked. Although money from his scholarship is available in the account, he finds it difficult to pay his educational fees. The papers relating to the investigation identify a particular suspicious entry of four thousand two hundred rupees, but the bank's system prevents him from using the entire account. Revati and Shalini Solanki ask under whose authority, by what order, against which amount and for how long such a restriction can lawfully operate. Both the need to preserve the disputed sum for investigation and the right to use legitimate, undisputed funds are subjected to judicial assessment.

In Ludhiana, Champa's error of identification, Shanti's

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Chapter 35 — The Account Was Frozen

limited banking dispute and Ramlakhan’s wage order require different remedies. In some accounts, ordinary transactions resume after appropriate verification. When no sufficient fresh grounds are produced for the sweeping restriction on Arjun’s account, the court directs that his undisputed funds be made accessible; the investigation into the true source of the four thousand two hundred rupees continues. The chapter brings face to face the administrative computer’s “zero” and its consequences for bread, education and trust in a home.

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Chapter 36 — The Special Court’s Difficult Questions

In September–October 2026, the Special Court at Jodhpur receives student lists, receipts for training fees, original banking details and papers relating to an alleged flow of money extending overseas. The investigator Neerja Rathore examines the particular predicate offence, the reality of the services supplied, the path taken by the money and the knowledge of each person concerned. An initial reconstruction is shown to be mistaken because accounts at two different branches have the same final four digits; the false match is removed. Even now, the ledger of five hundred entries does not prove the existence of five hundred separate beneficiaries.

In Sehgal business records linked to Dubai, questions arise concerning services

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Chapter 36 — The Special Court's Difficult Questions

genuinely provided, incomplete reports and the creation of invoices. Vikrant and the accountant Farida endeavour to preserve the history of the original files. The lawful process of serving notice upon persons abroad from an Indian court introduces a further difficulty. Revati attends to the limited rights of an affected account holder. The chapter acknowledges the genuine gravity of the investigation, while refusing to make similarities of names, large sums of money or grand allegations synonymous with the guilt of a particular person.

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Chapter 37 — Twenty-Seven Years Before the High Court

From October to December 2026, Arjun’s account-freezing case reaches the Rajasthan High Court. Revati and Shalini seek clarification as to whether the restriction was imposed at the request of an ordinary cyber investigation or under the separate statutory procedure for preventing money laundering. The conditions governing these two kinds of power, the provisions for judicial oversight and the available remedies differ. The State is asked to file an affidavit identifying the grounds for the restriction, its date, the sum to which it relates and the forum for review. The court does not determine the truth of the entire alleged financial crime in this particular writ proceeding.

The distinction between Arjun’s legitimate

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Chapter 37 — Twenty-Seven Years Before the High Court

scholarship and the disputed entry of four thousand two hundred rupees remains central to the judicial arguments. Sunita opposes treating an old labour register as proof of crime merely because it contains an incomplete name. Revati recalls once more the experiences of her father Shivnarayan in 2000. The High Court’s directions open a way for the citizen to understand the legal basis of a restriction and to seek its review, while the underlying financial investigation proceeds. The lessons of twenty-seven years of legal experience find expression in this limited, reasoned order.

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Chapter 38 — The Price of Falsehood

In November–December 2026, an image of an incomplete financial page circulates on social media and becomes the sensational claim that “ninety-five per cent of the money has disappeared.” Anuradha, Riddhi and Noor explain that such a slogan cannot be trusted without examining the denominator of the percentage, the basis of calculation and repeated transfers of the same money. Social suspicion falls upon a charitable organisation, yet the organisation has received no official criminal notice; the reporting carefully records that fact separately. Confronted by searching questions from fellow students, Arjun says that acknowledging the arrival of money in his account does not turn his entire life into a crime.

In the Special Court,

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Chapter 38 — The Price of Falsehood

promotional materials, file timestamps on alleged training certificates and evidence of services actually received are examined. Digital metadata alone is not conclusive proof of fraud; the original file, time zone, format and history of the device must also be considered. The Special Court’s financial questions are not confused with the High Court’s order concerning the frozen bank account. The chapter asks who must bear the cost when fragments of truth are transformed into falsehood through publicity.

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Chapter 39 — Before the Supreme Court

In January–February 2027, the question of an unrestricted freezing of Arjun’s account comes before the Supreme Court through the appropriate judicial process. The State invokes the needs of investigation; the citizens’ side insists upon clearly conferred powers, written reasons, review and the actual ability to use undisputed funds. The Court does not undertake a final examination of all the evidence concerning the underlying money-laundering allegations. It confines its attention to the immediate dispute over the power to freeze an account and the procedure for exercising that power. A large figure such as two thousand crore rupees, however prominent in public debate, does not automatically become the subject of this limited

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Chapter 39 — Before the Supreme Court

judicial controversy.

The Court lays down principles requiring competent authority, reasons in writing, proportionality in the restriction, respect for legitimate limits of confidentiality, meaningful information to the account holder affected and timely review. The effect upon undisputed means of livelihood and essential payments is held to be relevant, but no universal direction is made for the automatic release of every sum. Mukul’s refund, the inquiry relating to Vikrant and the financial questions before the Special Court continue. Shivnarayan explains to Revati that the significance of a judicial decision is proved through its practical implementation.

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Chapter 40 — The Verandah of the District Court

In March–April 2027, Revati and the elderly Shivnarayan return to the verandah of the district court in Darbhanga, where the story began in 2000. The principles laid down by the Supreme Court are now passing through the process of becoming practice in banks, courts and other institutions. Arjun can use his undisputed funds, but the question of the four thousand two hundred rupees remains separate. Mukul’s seven thousand five hundred rupees have still not been returned. A junior employee receives limited relief because the available evidence is found insufficient to frame a charge against that person, while the investigation concerning others continues.

In Ludhiana, Ramlakhan receives an instalment of his verified wage arrears;

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Chapter 40 — The Verandah of the District Court

Sunita understands that the aim of the struggle for rights is to preserve the ordinary food, education and rest of a household. At Marudhar, Saurabh and Akshay correct the author names in a book; in the Andamans, families establish a new order in their lives. New people, among them Shyamnandan, arrive at the verandah in Darbhanga carrying their own papers. The closing scene offers no final and all-encompassing victory. Instead, it calls for a judicial culture in which each person is heard, mistakes are corrected and tested evidence is honoured in place of accusation.

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SECTION / खण्ड

The Narrative as a Whole

15 · Bharat 2027

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The Narrative as a Whole

Across these forty chapters, justice is not the single decision of a single court, but a succession of institutional and human efforts unfolding through time. Neelkanth’s seized ledger, Ramdev’s map, Saira’s burnt certificates, Sudha’s missing records, Sunita’s register of wages, Manasvi’s privacy, Arjun’s frozen bank account and the Supreme Court’s principles all preserve their own distinct facts. Yet these episodes are joined by one ethical thread: behind every name, number, photograph, digital identifier or official seal, one must seek the knowledge, role, rights and suffering of a living human being. The narrative ends in 2027; the journey of its questions about justice does not.

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